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THE FASCINATING OF MR. SAVAGE

BY HELEN MILECETE

Author of "A Detached Pirate," "A Girl of the North," etc.

I.

"I AM going to float a company. I must do something!"

"Do," said Mrs. Norton. She nestled into her cushions of pale blue satin and hid one ear in the frills. "Get George to help you; he is the best man I ever knew to float things that are er—er——"

"Oh! my company is to be a limited company and it won't be er—— There will be only one shareholder. It is a real company. Don't fidget so."

"Have you made up the prospectus?"

"Yes, for private circulation only. The prospects are fair; the results may be millions!" She spoke in the grandiloquent tone one uses when relating the superiority of a hair-restorer or a complexion-wash. "The name is the Black Adela Co., Limited!"

Mrs. Norton sat up. "What does it mean?" she asked plaintively.

"Black Adela, whose beauty is unappreciated by an ungrateful and non-discriminating country, has beautiful hair, blue eyes, a complexion which, if it were assisted, might figure as immaculate in the society news of the papers or in the advertisement columns of the *Lady's*——"

"Good Heaven, Adela! are you quite cracked? Or are you thinking of opening an oil and color shop? Have you invented a new thing for the skin? What are you going to do?"

"Nothing of that sort. I am going to float myself." She spoke slowly and with deliberation.

"Float yourself!" For once Mrs. Norton's sweet voice was shrill.

"Are you going to float in a bathing-dress or on a raft? Who will pay? How will you make any money?"

"I shall stake my all. Listen!" She continued as if she were reading aloud, "A good figure, excellent feet, a charming manner, with magnetism thrown in, and——"

"Rot not left out," interrupted Mrs. Norton. "What are you driving at? Why, you look as if you were going to cry!"

"Listen, Gerty. I am twenty-seven."

"Don't say it so loud. Everyone knows I am older than you are. I am well aware of your age, but you don't look it. You can be twenty-seven for ages yet, twenty-three to a man who adores you, twenty sometimes. Why, I knew——"

"Yes," interrupted Adela, "I know you did. That woman had money. It is impossible to be permanently twenty without money. I am getting thin, I am losing my looks, I am vegetating while I am young, and life is passing. Do you remember that old tune we used to sing as a part-song at school? 'Carnival's passing—passing away?' That is in my head all day. It is true; my Carnival—my youth—is passing, passing away. I can hear fate singing it always, and I want to live, to be——"

"Do add, 'to suffer.' It pains me to hear my childhood's maxims misquoted. Of course you will suffer. Whereas, if you just sat down and waited patiently, you don't know what might happen to you."

"Wait? For what? For the Judgment Day?"

"Marry," said Mrs. Norton lazily. She let her head sink in the blue frills again.

"Marry! Marry!" repeated her friend with scorn. "You talk as if it were as easy to get a husband as it is to advertise for a cook."

"I assure you that it is much easier to get a husband than it is to get a cook," answered Mrs. Norton.

"Who would you suggest should lead me to the altar? Which one of my few admirers? The clerk in the drug store? He must get fifteen dollars a week. The man at the bank? How would you like him? Would any of the others do? They come to see me to yarn. But they are married! They would have to take me to Salt Lake City to join the Mormons because, strangely enough, a man is not allowed to have two wives in this country. All the men I know are poor or else married."

"I know this place is poky and dull, but I want you to come and spend the summer with me at Murray Bay."

"How could I? My mother-in-law would be so hurt if she saw me with your party. You are not considered a wise counsellor in the lodge of my in-laws."

"They don't pay your rent. Why should you care what they think?"

"I am weak-minded. I cannot bear to hurt people's feelings."

"You are afraid of that old harridan."

"I am," said Adela, "I am terrified of her. I am going to London."

"You are going to London?" Mrs. Norton was breathless. "To London! What for?"

"To float the company."

"You—Adela Percy, widow, pretty,—no, you aren't pretty, but sometimes I think you have more fascination than mere prettiness,—are going to London to run a—— Is it a shop you are thinking of starting?"

"Yes, a shop."

"What are you going to sell?"

"Myself."

"Good Heaven, Adela! I don't call that a joke."

"I do not mean it to be a joke. Do I look like a joke?"

Mrs. Norton glared at her. Adela wore a long, plain, black gown; there was no touch of white anywhere on it; her hair was done low on her neck; her blue eyes were full of tears; she looked as if she were going to cry; her face was strained and her ridiculous baby mouth was set and hard.

"You do not look at all like a joke," said Mrs. Norton. "You do not look pretty."

"I feel mouldy," said Adela, "as if I were damp and covered with clogging furry stuff, just like jam when it's going bad. You can shudder, but I feel it. Dear Gerty, you have been so good to me, you won't tell, will you?"

"I'll tell George. I never keep anything from him."

Adela laughed—the involuntary laugh of one who is overtaken by sudden amusement. "George does not matter. You won't mention it to the others?"

"No, I swear that. But go on, I am tired of waiting. When you have anything to say, say it, that is my motto."

"I am starting for London on the twenty-seventh of March. I sail from Boston in the Amsterdam. You know my life, how hard I have had to work?"

The other nodded and said, "You seemed as if you liked it."

"Of course. I am not such a fool as to tell what I felt. The woman who talks courts ridicule. But I loathed it. When he, Bertram, took me away from it all and married me I did not much mind being married."

"You didn't much mind being married?" repeated Gerty. "Most women like it. A husband means a house; there is someone to pay your bills, and—well, it means other young men and opportunities."

"I don't care for men; I never like anything in lumps, and an individual man between a woman and her husband makes war. The opportunities you don't want are no good to you. I know lots of women marry to have Mrs. on their cards and on their tombstones——"

"Go on," jeered Gerty.

"It is refreshing to have a house of your own and your own way most of the day, but marriage spells misery if you don't love the man; to accept him for what he can give and not for what he is, is a good way of going to meet disaster.

"I don't like your picture." Mrs. Norton's tone was icy. "I never saw one like it; it reminds me of a common chromo-lithograph. I think you are trying to illustrate my motives."

"I am not," answered Adela wearily. "I—— Do you know that I loved Bertram? I could have killed him when he went off to South Africa and left me. I could, not because he went away, but because he wanted to go. I would rather have seen him dead than going away from me living, for he volunteered."

"You are a funny mixture. I never thought you felt it as much as that. You always seemed resigned, heartless."

"When a woman keeps her head and her eyes are dry men and women call her heartless. He left me alone, and I got thirty dollars a month from Ottawa as a reminder that I was Mrs. Percy and he had left some money for me. He sent me a letter on a dirty sheet of paper now and then, and I had to wait, to wait—for what? For the rubbishy news we get here about the war and—it was like the Judgment Day and New Year's Day rolled into one. Despair, desperation, and good resolutions were all jumbled up together in my brain; I felt as if it would burst."

"He was very fond of you."

"I was very fond of him, you mean. He sailed away into the night and I was alone, and—well, you know that he was killed at Pardeberg. I got a little pension, but from being prosperous I became poor, lonely. He left me one thousand pounds, nearly five thousand dollars—it sounds more in dollars. Now I am twenty-seven, I will never love anyone again——"

Mrs. Norton gave a sound which resembled a chuckle.

"Never!" asseverated Adela. "You can laugh. If I had any feeling left, if I felt there was any chance of my loving again, do you think that I *would*, that I *could*, do what I am going to do?"

"You haven't told me yet what you are going to do."

"I am afraid you will tell."

"All right, then, keep your secret buried in your own heart. I don't want to know it. I should hate to be entrusted with a secret which, if told, would bring disaster to any happy home. A secret which could hurt any woman could never rest happily in my soul."

"Woman! What woman could it hurt?"

"Aren't you planning an elopement?"

"Didn't I tell you that I could never love anyone again?"

"Alas! that announcement is generally the prelude to some awful and contraband act. I think you have made up your mind to elope with a married man."

"I always knew you were an idiot," said Adela.

"Explain quickly," said Gerty. "Do not deviate from the truth. Though, Adela, I think you are making a mistake; it is not wise to strip your soul for a woman to look at."

"I suppose I ought to tell you what I mean to do without giving you any reason for it. Still, Gerty, I can trust you."

"Trust no woman, howe'er pleasant," said Gerty. "Notice my addition to the poet's lines."

"I have sold the bonds in which my five thousand dollars were invested. I have that sum in the bank now, and I am going to take it out and seek my fortune. Don't interrupt me." Gerty had her mouth open, but she shut it again. "I am going to invest my capital in myself, in my clothes, in my own personal adornment! I am going out into the Arena to find a husband, or else to the workhouse—when my money is all spent."

"Arenas are dangerous. You are not used to a crowd nor to the noise."

"I know, but I may as well go and try my luck. I am going to England on a good ship—not too quick a liner, but on a good, substantial steamer on which the-not-rushed-for-time people travel. I am not bad looking, and I will marry anyone who can support me. How could I even contemplate this——"

"If you were not mad? You were not going to say that? I beg your pardon, I naturally thought it was the only finish possible to your sentence."

"How could I even think of it," continued Adela, "if my heart were not dead—dead and cold, in a grave somewhere?"

"You are only twenty-seven. Did you know that some wise man said a woman's strongest passions come on her when she is thirty-five? That is why most divorced women are over thirty."

"Passion!" said Adela contemptuously.

"Oh, yes," said Gerty. "You talk of passion as if it were the plague. Wait! You mention your heart as if it were an iron cross you had erected; as if nothing could alter the shape, nor the form, nor the inscription on it. Don't you know that a hurricane could blow it down? One night's awful storm could lay it flat on the ground and cover the—what you think everlasting—inscription with water and mud. Your heart is not dead, and someone else might soften it so that it would be possible to put another word on it. You talk as if it were made of granite, like Cleopatra's Needle, and fixed up on the

Thames Embankment with policemen round it. Go home, take two pills, and don't come near me for a week."

Mrs. Percy put on her hat and walked down the one street of the little town to the custom-house. She paid thirty dollars' duty on two gowns and had them sent to her boarding-house by the expressman. Then she sent a draft to the steamer's agents in Boston for one hundred and fifty dollars; this was to pay for her cabin on the Amsterdam.

She spent the rest of the day tearing up letters. She cried over some of them, but she decided that was weak of her. Bury the dead and march home to the quickstep, that was the line she meant to take. She did not try on the new gowns until the next day, and when she arrayed herself in them she decided at 128 New Bond Street they had done her work well. The investment of the first part of her capital looked better than dull, ugly bonds. She gave a little skip for pure self-admiration.

She did not go near Mrs. Norton for three days, and at the end of the third Mrs. Norton telephoned to her.

"Come down and dine to-morrow night. We are leaving the next day by the maritime express. Are you sane?"

"I will come to dinner," said Mrs. Percy, and she laughed a little. "I am still the same."

Arrayed in one of her new frocks (the other was for the steamer, and it was short, smart; there were shoes, stockings, and a hat to go with it), Adela walked down to the hotel.

"You were not in earnest," said Gerty. "You have given up that mad scheme of yours. You look sweet, ducky, lovely, in that gown. How becoming black and white is to your skin. You are not going to London; that gown will do for Murray Bay."

"I have taken my passage—I sail in a week," said Adela.

"You will have no luck," said Gerty.

Adela only smiled. "I am not going for luck," she said calmly. "I want something less ephemeral than luck. I am going to look for a situation. Marriage is the best profession for a woman, and I am going to try and get a suitable place in the profession. Why not?"

Mrs. Norton did not answer her.

"Have you anything to send to Mrs. van Ingen? I'll go to see her."

Mrs. Norton looked critically at Adela, and she decided in her wrath and amazement that Mrs. Percy's hair was dyed. No woman was ever born with blue eyes and black hair! Such an effective combination must have been engineered; the hair was colored, for not even a wizard had ever invented such a thing for the eyes. Gerty was annoyed; she had made her own arrangements for Murray Bay, and she had intended that Adela should assume the care of her children and her husband while she amused herself in other ways. That night she wrote

to her sister, Mrs. van Ingen—the Mrs. van Ingen from whom Adela expected so much.

II.

THEY were taking in the gangway. That means a lot. The last link with the land was going. Adela stood on the promenade deck of the Amsterdam and felt an impulse to bolt ashore. There was no one to see her off; how could there be? She felt lonely, frightened, friendless, and unprotected. In all her life she had never gone anywhere alone. The casual glances thrown on her by strangers made her feel hot and cold. Did they think she was an adventuress? An adventuress! The truth of that name as applied to herself made her uncomfortable. A few ardent spirits on the wharf were waving handkerchiefs to some of the passengers. The tugs were snuffing round the big ship, gradually turning her round. Adela looked at the land and at the houses in the clear spring sunshine; she wondered when and how she would see them again. She felt as if she were starting for the North Pole, to some unknown and far-away corner of the earth, and her heart sank, her courage almost failed her. The wind blew cold on her face and she shivered. The voyage in search of fortune had begun.

She went below and put on the black-and-white cloth dress of a gown which she had ordered with a view to the undoing of man on board ship. The long coat which went with it was made of scarlet, the color of bravery. She had a cup of tea and came up on deck. The stewardess was nice, and Adela had her cabin to herself; that was a joy. The passengers were all standing about the deck; they had not settled down. She went into the reading-room and wrote a letter to Gerty to say farewell. She wrote bravely. Why not? To succeed one must always believe in one's ultimate success. Gerty must never know how she yearned to be back again in her hopeless boarding-house nor how dreadful she felt. She gave the letter to the steward to send ashore by the pilot boat; then she stood by the rail watching the light-houses glide by. How fast, how unnecessarily fast, the Amsterdam was going! The sea was beginning to be ruffled, the bell rang, the engines stopped, the pilot clambered down the wriggling rope ladder. Adela waved a farewell to him with her hand—a farewell to the old life! Only one man saw it. He smiled and went below to find out where his seat was in the saloon. He intended to be near the lady with the blue eyes and the heavy black hair.

A dim rim was all that remained of the land. She settled herself down to dulness or to adventure, whichever the world might hold for her. At last the dressing-bugle sounded, so she went to array herself for dinner. She had resolved to be perfect as regards clothes, for who knew? Some man with money might see her, might like, might love— She shuddered. There was too much dynamite about her

scheme to make it a profitable subject for meditation; then and there she vowed that she would never think of her motives, that she would call business pleasure; after all, the name was everything; the label frequently sells the jam.

"Are you my neighbor?" A girl came out of the cabin opposite Adela's. "I am so lonely. I don't know a soul, do you?"

"No," said Adela; "I am lonely too."

"I am going to London," said the girl. "I am a journalist. You are travelling for pleasure, I'm sure—now, aren't you?" Adela nodded. "I knew that by your gown, you have on such a pretty one. I've got work on the staff of the *Gorgeous Vision*. Ever heard of it?"

"Not yet," said Adela.

"That is right," laughed the other, "but you will hear of it. You are right to say 'not yet.' I was getting tired of my life in America, so when they offered me a permanent post, just to write about plays, I took it, with the bad pay and all. I want to get to London, I want to get on! You are going to dress? So am I."

The saloon was full when Mrs. Percy sailed in. Her long, trailing black skirt was graceful, and her bodice of dull silk, covered with lace, fitted her as if she had had it stretched on her. The lace, transparent at the throat,—such a white throat,—was too becoming to her, thought some of the other women. They had prepared for seasickness,—their careless dressing proclaimed that fact,—and they looked as if they had slung on their blouses, which were not too fresh. Mrs. Percy was radiant. Why not? The play had begun, and she meant to play the heroine. If she felt shaky, she did not show it; if she trembled, no one knew it.

The steward found her seat for her; her name was in front of it on a card, but it had been turned round by a curious person, someone had wanted to know who was coming to that seat. Next to her, on the left, was a man. She did not pause to look at him; her face was too hot to bear the gaze of all the people at the table. She sat down. To her joy the girl whose cabin was opposite hers had the seat on her right.

"This is nice," said Adela as she looked at the menu. "I always feared that the seats on board ship were arranged by the alphabet, and that the passengers had no joy prepared for them."

"I did it," laughed the girl. "I went to the steward and told him I wanted to sit next you."

The man on Adela's left smiled a little, but no one saw it; he also had been to the steward and exchanged a couple of sovereigns for the privilege of having his seat next to Mrs. Percy's. He remarked tentatively, "I recommend the oysters."

Adela laughed and ordered oysters.

He was studying the menu and she studied him. He was dark; he

had a short, crisp mustache; he was well dressed in old, well-made clothes, and, above all things, he spoke nicely to the steward. Adela decided he was not uninteresting. Her neighbor, whose name was Miss Furnival, was already gayly conversing with the man on her right.

She turned to Adela and said: "My neighbor considers it very mean of the steward not to have put him between you and me. His name is Savage; he says he knows Mrs. Norton; she asked him to look out for you."

Mrs. Percy ordered roast beef and felt the voyage was not beginning badly.

"I hope I may consider myself introduced to you, Mrs. Percy," said Mr. Savage.

"I think you may," said Adela demurely. "A ship introduction is easily forgotten, if you want to forget it."

"And if I do not want to forget it?" asked Mr. Savage.

"Well, then, it is easily remembered."

"Is this your first voyage?" asked the man next Adela.

"Yes," she answered. "I hope it won't be my last. I am going to London."

"So am I," he answered. "You go to friends?"

"I hope to meet friends incidentally," said Adela. "I am going on business." How nice it sounded, and yet—and yet——

"My name is Crossley," he said. "I know yours is Percy, for I looked at your label."

"At my label?" she repeated. "Oh! I see, you mean my card. Yes, my name is Percy."

They went up on deck after dinner. The night was calm; the stars were out in a white sky that looked clear and cold to her eyes; the air was soft, and so Adela sat down in her deck chair and Mr. Crossley put his beside her. They talked for some time. He asked her if her husband was the Pardeberg Percy.

"Yes," she said, and something very like a grip seized her throat.

She felt some surprise that Mr. Savage had not come to speak to her. He had said that Mrs. Norton had told him to be civil. Had Mrs. Norton told him more? A cold, horrible chill of apprehension and fear, the fear that hath torment, crept into her heart. Had Gerty told him? But no, she would not have been so mean.

A steward brought her a letter. She was pleased. It was from Gerty.

"May I read it?" she said, turning to Mr. Crossley.

"By all means, if you can see."

He moved his chair. He was so strong, so hard, so brown, and his hands and nails were such a good shape. Adela gave a faint sigh. He was not the sort of man she had come to attract; he was too good to

be married by a woman who would accept him as she would a good situation.

"Why did you sigh?" he asked.

"I felt bored by life, by circumstances," said Adela candidly and bitterly.

"Every woman is an actress," said Mr. Crossley.

"Doesn't it ever occur to you that we get tired of it? To play forever that one loves domesticity is wearing." She stopped. Candor is like the X-rays, it tells too much of the inner working of the mind. Why should she be fool enough to tell him that she wanted to talk to the hero, she wanted to find the hero, she wanted him to—the indefinite hero—to love her. "Pretend you enjoy playing the parts you have to play," said wisdom in her mind.

Adela opened her letter.

"DEAREST ADELA: I met Mr. Savage in the train coming up, and he talked of going to England by the Amsterdam. I told him to look out for you if he did choose that ship. He is the rich Savage, the proprietor of something, I forget whether it is hair-wash or dog-biscuit. Anyhow, with your looks and your aspirations you ought to be able to work him, for he is a millionaire—in pounds, not in dollars. Return to me as Mrs. Reginald Francis Savage and I will forgive you everything. Be sure you don't tell him what you are up to. I hope you will write to me often, for you will have adventures. Yours always,

"GERTY."

Adela's heart felt lighter. Gerty had not betrayed her confidence! She felt stung with the shame of what Mr. Savage might have said and done had he known of her intentions. The relief of finding he knew nothing was almost too great.

"I am tired," she said.

Mr. Crossley accompanied her to the companion-way; he carried her rugs and said he hoped to see her again in the morning. She liked his clear-cut face, his air of self-confidence, but who was he? Was she no wiser than a foolish girl to lose her heart so easily? And Mr. Savage was a millionaire—in pounds.

"How are you to-day?" Adela had breakfasted in bed and then went on deck for a walk. Some of the passengers were ill; she felt quite gay. Mr. Savage stood by her. He looked worn and gray. The Amsterdam was snorting through the sea; she was beginning to plunge through the big, white horses, and the air smelt damp, there was no land smell in it. Adela loved the rocking-horse motion; Mr. Savage looked as if he hated it.

"I love this," she answered. Was it her imagination, or was his neck fat and bulgy?

Mr. Crossley was walking up and down. He stopped a moment to ask her how she felt and whether he could do anything for her, but he did not stay with her. She wished he had stayed, but she devoted herself to the fascinating of Mr. Savage. He was with her all day; he spent the next one with her too, but his words did not ring true, though he was attracted by her, she could see. She did not like his glances. She scolded herself, this was the fault of her too ardent imagination, yet he did not appeal to her, though he was the rich Savage.

He talked about meeting her in town; he planned dinners and the theatres with her and promised to see that she had a good time. It was all tinsel, and Adela felt gay one moment and dreary the next, for it seemed as if she were playing marbles, there was nothing but the tinkle of the little balls. He bored her, but he had money. This was not the way to take what fate gave her. She had a future to live through. Perhaps she would not be able to make her money last for a year, as she had planned it should last. "Any check when you are penniless," said Adela to herself with a poor attempt at gayety. Gerty would have been delighted had she seen the way Mr. Savage was beginning to make love to Mrs. Percy. Some men's lovemaking is a sticky thing, just like molasses-candy and—— "Keep your eye on the future," said wisdom. She forgot the fact that quick lovemaking makes dull marrying.

Then the ship began to take green seas on board. To Adela it was all glorious, all new life, but Mr. Savage retired to his cabin to repair the ravages of sea-sickness. He stayed there, to her great, though unmentioned, joy.

Mr. Crossley then attached himself to her. The deck steward made a point of saying, "The chairs are together, sir," and they had the ship pretty much to themselves. She could not find out much of his history. He had had a hard life; so much information did he vouchsafe to her. He was a real white man, but had he money? Had he any position? What had he? He took good care of her, he saw she had all she wanted. She was never cold, never lonely, never without rugs or anything that is required on board a ship on a cold Atlantic voyage.

To fall in love with a man probably as penniless as herself was not what she had come to do, and she resisted his power over her. She thought of him, and would not think while she wanted to think. She remembered what Gerty had said. She decided there was something in the sea-air that affected her brain—she never acknowledged the possession of a heart. Her present feelings could only be the result of five days' constant conversation with a man who was clever and interesting. She assured herself that her interest in him would vanish as everything else vanishes and become merely like the memory of a good partner at a ball.

Miss Furnival was very ill,—sea-sick and wretched,—and so Adela used to take the girl into her cabin for the afternoon. Miss Furnival shared hers with four females. It became the most natural thing in the world when she was lying on Adela's sofa for Mr. Crossley to come in at four o'clock when the stewardess brought them tea and to sit and talk to them both. Why not? No one could object. Mrs. Percy was quite enough chaperone for Miss Furnival, and Miss Furnival's presence prevented anyone saying unkind things about Mrs. Percy.

Adela ceased to analyze and to argue with herself. She gave herself up to the pleasure of the present. Who ever heard of a woman having her heart lacerated in eight or nine days? They expected to land on the ninth day.

Mr. Savage recovered after the eighth day, and then there was a little comedy. Mr. Crossley stuck to his post; Mr. Savage tried to usurp it; Adela told herself that she was neutral—she played the game for Crossley. As it happened, this was the best thing she could have done for her much-vaunted future, the future for which she had crossed the ocean to make arrangements. Mr. Savage became earnest, Mrs. Percy became frightened.

It was the last evening. She had looked pale—too pale—at dinner. Mr. Crossley ordered champagne and insisted on Mrs. Percy and Miss Furnival sharing his wine.

He had been ranching out in British Columbia. Mrs. Percy felt sure he was poor. Poor! She knew the ghastly ring of that word, and she hated to drink his wine, while she could not refuse it.

"Why are you coming back to England?" she asked boldly as she strolled up and down the deck with him.

"I am coming to seek my fortune," he said slowly. "I have an idea that it is waiting for me there."

"Only an idea?" said Adela.

"Well, yes, only an idea."

"Never follow, never stake, anything on an idea," she said earnestly. "I have done that and I have lost all."

She felt a little hysterical. It was pain to her to leave the ship. She loathed saying good-by to the cabin where she had been so happy—no, she would not call it happy, but where she had been at rest.

"I wonder," said he, "when and where we shall meet again?"

"Nowhere and never," she answered flippantly. "Perhaps you will come and see me at the Metropole."

"Perhaps I will," he answered. "I have no such words as 'nowhere' and 'never' concerning you in my vocabulary."

"Do you live in London? I have never been there. I am longing to see all the streets and places I have read about."

"I live nowhere just now," said Harold Crossley. "I shall have to be up in town a lot—looking after the idea, you know. This is our last walk together."

"Yes," said Adela, and added to herself, "I can hear the carpenter making my coffin. I did not spend all my gold to marry a man with a ranch which does not pay (he had confessed that), nor is running after an idea a better thing to do."

The breeze from the land was cold; the stars, the paving-stones of heaven, were gold and green and red in the clear north light.

"There is my star," said Mrs. Percy. She pointed to the bright one hanging in the west. "I—lived when it rose, when they discovered it; I hope before it sets I shall live again."

"You will if——"

"Here you are," said a cheerful voice. Mr. Savage, recovered and self-satisfied, stood before them. "Miss Furnival and I have been looking for you. I want to talk to Mrs. Percy. I have not seen you for days and I am starved for a sight of your face. Mr. Crossley, will you look after Miss Furnival?" In a minute the world was altered, the starlight was dimmer, and Mr. Savage and Mrs. Percy strolled along behind Mr. Crossley and Miss Furnival.

"Such a nice girl," said Mr. Savage with an admiring glance at Miss Furnival's back, "but crude, too fond of her profession and of moneymaking."

"So would you be," said Adela, "if you ever had to do without money. I think a profession is a good thing for a woman."

"Marriage is the best profession for a woman," he said didactically.

"Where did you hear that?" demanded Adela. "It is my maxim; I invented it."

"Did you?" he asked carelessly. "Mrs. Norton said it to me and I agreed with her. I thought it clever at the time. I am glad you said it. Every woman ought to marry: it rounds her off; it finishes her. I would never be bothered talking to a girl when I could talk to a married woman."

"Why not?" asked Adela.

"Don't you know?" He laughed softly. She did not like that laugh. "I suppose it is because a married woman is more amusing, more up in the ways of the world, more lenient. She understands more and isn't as hard as a girl."

"Where have they gone?" asked Adela, for the others had disappeared. Her exclamation was almost a cry.

"Gone! let them go. I want you to myself, to tell you that I love you."

"You don't, you——" She did not believe him.

"Yes, I do, I love you." They were standing on the end of the

promenade deck. He put his arm round her and tried to hold her face up to his.

"Don't!" she said,— "don't!" Memories strangled her, she gasped. Was it the feeling the wrong man had his arm round her? Her brain insistently asked her this question.

"You little witch! A girl would have let me, a girl would not have known that the moment had not come. I will see you in London, and you won't keep me waiting very long, will you? I love you."

Mrs. Percy went dolorously down to bed. In spite of her excellent prospects, she did not sleep.

The stewardess called her at five; the pilot was on board, they were going into Liverpool.

Adela went up to town with Miss Furnival; Mr. Savage fumed and followed by a later train. The ladies went third class; Miss Furnival had to do that, and Mrs. Percy would not leave her. Mr. Crossley had just time to ask Adela for her town address before he left the ship. He was staying in Liverpool. Mr. Savage invited Mrs. Percy to dine with him at the Carlton the next evening. She accepted his invitation. She hated herself; she could not forget Mr. Crossley, and she could have screamed with disgust at her own actions and her own motives. She took Miss Furnival with her to the Metropole for one night.

III.

ADELA wrote to Mrs. van Ingen from Queenstown, she hoped so much from Gerty's sister. Surely she would introduce her to the section of English life that Adela so yearned to know. No letter awaited her at the Metropole. She felt as if someone had struck her; though she assured herself there was not time for a letter to have come.

She went shopping and ordered two evening dresses and one fluffy day gown. She paid for them; this investment of the capital looked pretty. She wondered whether Harold Crossley would ever come to see her.

Nancy Furnival, full of indomitable energy, had found a flat for herself. It was in Ladies' Residential Chambers and consisted of a bed sitting-room with a tiny, wee pantry containing a gas stove. Nancy had a latch-key and her own front door, which gave her immense pleasure. Adela envied her. Things were costing her more than she had allowed for, but she hoped, with the invincible hope of the gambler, that all would come right. Was she not engaged to Mr. Savage?—to one of the richest men in England? Was she, though? Had he really meant that sudden and hateful avowal of affection for her? He came often to see her. One night she had dined with him at the Carlton and they went to the theatre. When the play was over he drove back with her to the Metropole.

"I will come in just for one cigarette and a little talk," he said. "I never really see you. I have not enjoyed to-night, it was too tantalizing. I want you to arrange for our little wedding tour together. You know that I love you. What is the number of your sitting-room? You can take me straight up there, can't you?"

"It is too late now." She was quite indifferent whether she offended him or not. "I have no sitting-room!"

"No sitting-room! Good Heaven! why did you come to a hotel where they can't give you a sitting-room? Leave to-morrow if they don't give you one."

"Is it necessary?"

"Of course it is. I won't come to see you and sit in the hotel drawing-room. I love you. I am not going to talk pretty selected platitudes in a public room for all the hotel haunTERS to hear. I am too well known for that."

"You can't come in to-night," said Adela decidedly.

"You little witch!" he laughed, "you know the way to enthrall me. Most women are cherries and overripe."

"I am not even ripe," said she coldly.

"I know that. Sometimes I wish you were, and yet that is why I admire you so much. If you had been riper, I would have tired of you long ago. The way you led Crossley on, on board ship, was positively inimitable—inimitable!" he said with admiration. "It was splendid!"

"Are you ever jealous? Could you ever be jealous?"

"Try me and see if you forget it. Don't you play tricks when I am not here, for if you do——"

"What will you do?"

"I don't talk," he answered.

"Good-night," said Adela. How foolish it was of her not to feel gay! Life was so dull. The circumventing of the embraces of Mr. Savage, fencing with him, dressing for him, fearing lest she might lose him and half hoping that she would, had brought her nerves to a state of tension. No band played a tune for her march along Life's road. She was paying the piper but fate was calling the tune!

She asked at the office for letters. There were none. It was dreary being in a strange land alone. Mrs. van Ingen had not written. Adela wrote to her again. Then she went to bed. The days passed. Mr. Savage still squirmed because she had no private sitting-room, but he had to sit in the hall or in the drawing-room. Adela dreaded being alone with Frank Savage. She disliked him, and he was going to be her husband. She could not bear to think of it, yet that was her reason for crossing the ocean; she had announced it, she had come to seek her fortune, to marry money, and she had the money and the man in her grasp. Her mistake was in having thought of a husband as merely

an incident in her career, a sort of Universal Provider; she saw that he would be a big and irremediable fact.

Her money was dwindling. Her hotel bill, try as she did to keep it small, was generally much more than she had allowed for. She forgot all the worries sometimes, for she lived a life of excitement, of intervals of forgetfulness and then of depression, worry, and despair.

"A gentleman in the drawing-room to see you, Ma'am," said a little boy, and she strolled leisurely downstairs. But her heart did not beat leisurely when she saw her visitor was Mr. Crossley. She hoped he had not seen her give a little, quick gasp.

"I am only up for three days," he said. "I have the day before me if you will share it with me. Can you come for a drive? We can get lunch somewhere."

"I would love it," answered she. For that day she would take out her heart and wear it on her chain. They drove down to Richmond and lunched at the Star and Garter. Then they went into the Park and sat under a big oak-tree. He had so much to tell her; he was like a boy, so gay.

"Are you a heartless woman?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered. She was determined to live up to the role she had planned for herself, to sign her own death-warrant. "I am heartless, I am mercenary."

"How can you be mercenary? I mean, how can you expect gold in exchange for a heart when you say you have no heart?"

"I do not ask for gold," said she quietly.

"I wonder why you never talk of yourself?"

"Because I despise myself."

"You shouldn't do that. Why need you?"

She shook her head. Oh, to be back at home in that little village going out to sit alone in the woods! It was dull, stagnant—still, it had been peaceful. Now she was out in Life's river and she felt the current was too strong for her.

"I have to do what seems best and most expedient," she said. "I loathe talking about myself; let me be happy to-day."

"Ah, then you are happy with me!" he said triumphantly.

"Yes," she answered with slow reluctance.

"Do you like your hotel?"

"Not much." This was a safe subject.

"Why not go into lodgings? It does not seem nice for you, so pretty and attractive, to be alone at the Metropole."

"My peerless bloom won't tarnish," she answered flippantly. "I don't intend to stay long at the Metropole."

"This is a lovely day," he said. "I am perfectly happy with you. On board ship I thought you were charming, just a charming incident."

("More incidents," thought she, and she smiled.) "I meant to talk to you as I would to any pretty woman. I began with that idea, or, rather, without any idea in my mind; afterwards I——"

"You?" she longed to hear him say what he intended.

"I got hurt. Then I landed and I worked; I was alone, and I could feel the sea-air on my face and hear the throb of the engines and see the fog sweeping across the deck, till even the head-light was dim; you and I were alone there together, and I"—he laughed—"I longed to see you again; I had to come for you to-day. I want you always with me."

Her spirit writhed as she realized what she would have to throw away.

"I call that mental aberration," she said slowly, while the blood leaped and throbbed with joy all over her. He loved her. She could have died gladly, then she grew chilly; the hurricane had come. Gerty had been right, and her heart was not made of granite.

"I am going to marry Mr. Savage," said Adela, and it seemed to her that her voice sounded as if it were coming through a fog; she could not see him for the mist in her eyes.

"Be warned in time; he will never marry anyone, he says so; he——"

"It is settled."

"Perhaps we had better be moving on." He spoke after a long pause, during which Adela saw herself, her motives, and her future—"Yes, God help me," she murmured, "the future"—in the bright light of horror and disgust.

"I suppose I had better congratulate you. You would like some tea before we start?"

"Tea!—tea would strangle me. I mean, thank you, I am not thirsty."

He talked occasionally, and sometimes she answered him and often she did not speak at all. The future bride of one of the richest commoners in England was not at all exhilarated.

"You will be in town again; come and see me," she said as he helped her out of the victoria. She had noticed the horses and the servants; they were both as perfect as it is possible to have. She clutched his hand as if she were afraid of his leaving her, as though she wanted to keep him.

"I won't lose sight of you, I hope," said Mr. Crossley. "There is Savage; I'll be off."

Mr. Savage stood on the hotel steps; his face was red and he looked cross.

"You've been out all day with Crossley," he said insolently.

"Yes, I have," she answered.

"Well, I don't like it. I suppose you let him kiss you."

"How dare you say that?"

"I don't like my goods shopworn."

"Nor do I," she answered. "You look very shopworn now."

He gave a half-mollified laugh.

"Look here," he said. "I've been to the manager while you were out; I've told him to give you a sitting-room at once. I am not going to play about hotel corridors waiting for any woman."

"It will cost a lot."

"Rot!" he answered. "I'll pay for it, if you like. I came to ask you to come to the opera to-night, I have a box." He did not add that Lady Mortlock had always adorned it nor that she had quarrelled with him, having heard rumors of his infatuation for an unknown beauty with black hair and blue eyes.

"I can't go."

"Why not? It is a big night, all the royalties will be there, and——"

"I would not go if they all had asked to meet me. I am going to bed; I shall dine in my room," and she went up in the lift, shut and locked her bedroom door, and fell to weeping.

It was of no use to call herself a fool, to hate herself, to loathe life, and to more than hate Frank Savage. It was her own fault, not his. She felt as if her skin had been peeled off and as if someone were hitting her on the raw flesh. She was applying the whip and scourging herself. She wriggled with the torture of the thoughts in her brain, and the reiteration of them, which she could not stop, was driving her frantic. She drank some tea, she could not eat anything. The boy brought her up some letters,—actually letters,—the first she had received for a month. One was from Miss Furnival, who wanted her to dine at the Hen Run—only women were allowed to dwell there, hence Nancy's name for it. She saw Mr. Crossley's writing.

"I think I had better not see you again, I can't bear it. I don't want to think of you belonging to Savage, so good-by, and I hope I may never meet you again. I love you better than my life; I'd give all I possess to marry you. If you ever are in trouble, if you should ever need a man or a man's strong arm, let me know. The banker's address I gave you will always find me, and if you don't marry Savage, for Heaven's sake send me a telegram. I don't care if you don't love me; if you were free I would do all I could to make you, and I believe I'd succeed. Yours always,

"H. M. C."

Harold Melton Crossley. Those were his names; she had seen them in his prayer-book on the Sunday they had church on board the Am-

sterdam. Here was another shattered illusion: he had said good-by to her. Adela buried her face in her pillow and sobbed. The tears were so hot they pained her eyes, and weeping did not make her feel better.

There was another letter which she had not noticed. She read it idly. It was from Mrs. van Ingen, asking her to an "at home" the next day.

"Forgive the short invitation," wrote Clara van Ingen, "I only just got your note. I have been away, and it has been following me about." This recognition of her existence came too late to bring any feeling of elation to Adela's crushed spirit. She could not sleep, and she tossed and thought and planned all night. Mr. Savage sent her some flowers in the morning and a diamond ring. It was a blaze of light, but it brought none to her.

At four o'clock that afternoon Adela, arrayed in a gown of soft white muslin, a simple frock trimmed with real lace and chiffon, stood in her sitting-room with Mr. Savage. He had tried to kiss her, but she had only laughed at him and said:

"Don't crush my gown. It is new, and I don't want it to look shopworn."

"You will never forgive me for that."

"I think I never will." Her voice sounded as if it had been on ice for a week. "That will rather amuse you, won't it?"

"It will. No woman ever kept me hanging about her for six weeks, as you have done, without any reward."

"You forget the occasional kiss, and also that I cheer you with my priceless society."

"In July," he remarked, "we'll go to—where would you like to go? On the yacht? You are a good sailor, and we'd put into port every night."

"Not in July," she answered; "there are so many anniversaries in July that I must keep. How would September suit you?"

"Not at all. You talk as if——"

"I must be off now. Come and put me into my coupé. You dine with me to-night?"

"Yes, up here."

"No, down below. You can smoke in this room afterwards."

"You look better than I have ever seen you look," he said with slow appreciation.

"It must be this simple frock," she answered. She knew that its simplicity was the most expensive art.

"I wonder how Mrs. Van came to ask you to her show? They talk a lot about you and me."

"Do they?" she asked indifferently. "So you know Mrs. van Ingen?"

"I have been introduced to her scores of times, but she always cuts me."

"I have known her nearly all my life," said Adela.

She made her entrance into the van Ingen box (for the house was only a square box) with a rustle and an air of bravery which was counterfeit. Mrs. van Ingen, who stood at the top of a proud eminence, the narrow staircase, was cool, not to say frigid, but Adela, who had gone to the function expecting nothing, was not disappointed when she discovered she would get nothing in the way of friendship from Clara van Ingen. Not one kind word nor look was vouchsafed her, no inquiries were made for Gerty; Adela was clearly an unwelcome guest.

"To hastily resuscitate a friendship is like trying to warm an omelette," said Adela boldly. "I am sure you resent my claiming any acquaintance with you." Mrs. van Ingen stared at her bold visitor. "I would not have bothered you if you had not besought me to do so when you were in Newcastle."

"Do go and have some tea." Mrs. van Ingen corralled a man. He looked at the convoy she desired him to escort to the tea-room and clearly approved of Mrs. Percy's appearance.

"I am always delighted to see my friends," said Mrs. van Ingen. "I am going away soon, and after I return I hope to see more of you——"

"Clara van Ingen," said Adela, "don't talk rubbish; you don't want me and I shall not bother you again. After Mr. Burgess has given me some tea I am going home. You need not make excuses; you know that you don't want to be bothered with me now."

Mr. Burgess got Adela a cup of cold and bitter tea. He talked as well as he could while his coat was nearly torn off him by a ramping, thirsty crowd. They were jammed in the doorway, and Mrs. Percy gave a sigh as she remembered those simple little frills on her gown.

A thirsty friend waved to Mr. Burgess.

"I won't be long," he said, and elbowed his way through the mob.

"That is the woman!" said a man behind Adela. "She is a beauty. She is always with Savage." Adela gasped. Could he mean her? Were they talking about her? If only she could get away, but she seemed to be held in a vice.

"He is infatuated," said the woman with him, laughing. "He won't marry her; he says Savages never do marry—permanently."

Adela squirmed as she felt their eyes on her face.

"She can't mind that slight omission," he said. "Mrs. van Ingen tells me she is only an adventuress; she actually came over here to find a husband. Savage was the wrong card to hold."

"It was rather brilliant of her," said the woman, with a half

grudging admiration in her voice. Then she added censoriously, "I wonder Clara van Ingen has her here. It is too much to expect us to mix with all the women Mr. Savage adores. Everyone knows he never could tolerate anyone decent. Now, Lady Mortlock is the only one I ever called on, and she——"

Adela was not used to hearing such a delineation of her own character. No doubt they were accustomed to thinking of her as they described her. She gave them a push. Not in vain had she used her arms paddling her canoe and fishing; they had to give her room to get away. She left most of her flounces on the floor under the man's foot, but she did not care. "Torturing is in fashion again," she said to herself as she went up to Clara.

"Good-by, Clara," said Adela. She stood in front of her, tall and lithe, and her eyes were blazing with anger. "I think you might have told me what Gerty had written to you. I have just heard your guests talking about me; they said you had supplied the information."

Mrs. van Ingen winced. She was never brave at close quarters; she always told a lie rather than hurt anyone's feelings. "I do not understand you."

"They said you were the agency which had supplied the news, that I am an adventuress in search of—oh," cried Adela impatiently, "let it all go. I must be off, but I just wanted to tell you that I am engaged to be married."

"Yes?" Clara was politely indifferent.

"To Mr. Savage," finished Adela.

"You clever woman," gushed Mrs. van Ingen, "how on earth did you do it? Ever so many girls and mothers have tried. How did you——"

"Good-by," interrupted Adela. This might be glory, but she felt like death!

IV.

THE dressing of Adela took a long time that evening, and if before she began the decorating of her person (though she did not paint) she drank a strong brandy and soda, no one knew it except the waiter who brought it up to her.

The next day would see the signing of her death-warrant. It would appear in the paper under the heading of "Fashionable Intelligence," but, nevertheless, it would be her death-warrant and would run as follows:

"A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Mrs. Percy, widow of the late Captain Bertram Percy, Canadian Regiment, and Mr. Frank Savage, of Castletown Castle, Inverness Lodge, Banffshire, and 400 Park Lane."

Adela looked unapproachably brilliant when her guest arrived. She had ordered the champagne he liked; it cost a guinea a bottle, but she did not care. As the future wife of a millionaire with two country places and a house in Park Lane she need not consider the price of the wine she drank.

She felt numbed, as if someone had given her a dose of morphia. The horror of what they said about her and the pain—for Gerty had played the traitor and told Mrs. van Ingen—had turned Adela's brain into wool; her head felt stuffed. Gerty had told Clara the truth; that was what stung.

"What sort of a time did you have?" asked Savage. He did not talk much until after the entrée, which he said was good; all the rest of the dinner he called beastly.

"The answering of that question requires consideration," said she. "I nearly ruined my new gown, and I finished its career by trampling it to bits when I got home, I was so angry."

He grinned. "They were horrid?"

"Truthful would be a better name for them; truth is generally horrid."

"Did Mrs. Van mention me?"

"No. I heard one or two other people mention you. Have you finished? I told them to send the coffee up to the sitting-room."

"This is better than sitting with the gallery," he said as he lighted a cigar, and the waiter, who had brought the coffee and poured out the liqueurs, shut the door as he went out. "Come and sit beside me? You won't?" He got up and went over to her. He put his arms round her as she was standing by the mantelpiece.

"Don't kiss me," she said. "You sha'n't kiss me," and she slipped down out of his arms on to the floor. That was a trick taught her by Gerty, for a man wants to hold a woman close to him; he does not think of holding her up. "I have something to say," she said. "To-day or yesterday, I forget which it was, I said I would not marry you in July. I want to marry you next week. You can put the announcement in the papers."

"We'll go to Dover first; the papers can wait. I don't put my doings in the papers. There would be some pretty reading if I did," and he laughed.

"This excursion of yours," said Adela with a pale face and strained, staring eyes, "must go into every paper. I will have it where everyone—all those women—can see it; I would, if I could, hire sandwich men to walk up and down Bond Street with notices in large letters."

"What rot!" he said as he was drinking his liqueur. "Did you ever try brandy and benedictine mixed? Or was it benedictine? It

was brandy to start with, and I forget what they put with it; I had it to-day at the lunch Molyneux gave. What a head I have! I cannot remember what it was he gave me mixed."

"You must write out a notice and send it to the papers to-night," said Adela. She had not heard one word of what he had been saying, and she had not swerved from her own track. "Don't you understand that I won't be branded? Don't you know that they say I am—I won't have such things said of me, so write it out, or I will. Get a license and I will marry you next week."

"You can get the license," he answered.

"Be sensible for once," besought Adela. "I am so tired to-night."

"I am sensible; I am sensible of my luck, and——"

"Are you? You don't know what they were saying about me to-day."

"Don't I? I can jolly well guess. They say a good many things about my women friends. But you will soon get used to it. It is only the beginning that takes you so hard! Wait until you see——"

"What do you mean?" interrupted Adela coldly. "Does it amuse you to think of what they said about your future wife?"

"Haven't met her yet. What do I care for the way they talk about an unknown person? My future wife must be about two now. I am not going to marry until I am fifty; then I will have a girl of twenty. What are you bothering about? Pack your trunks and let us be up and off. I am tired of London."

"I do not understand one word you say," she answered wearily. "You say you want me to come to Dover first, and you laugh about your future wife. Are you going to poison me when you are fifty?" She spoke with an air of assumed frivolity which sounded sadder than tears.

"What rubbish you talk! I never cared anything for anyone except for you. You look awfully well to-night, you entrancing cat! I have no time to think of anyone but you."

"Is it all a dream? Tell me quickly, for I don't know what you mean—do you love me?" She was bewildered.

"Yes, of course I do; I love you better and I want you more than I have ever loved or wanted any woman."

"I told Mrs. van Ingen that I was going to marry you."

"You told her what?" shouted he. He sat up and stared at her. She saw how weak his shoulders were—how hard his mouth.

"Don't be so noisy. I told her—what I said: that I am engaged to you. It is true, isn't it?" She laughed a little. If only it were not so hideously true!

"True? I am not going to marry any woman. No, it is not true. I am much too wary a bird. What an idiot you were to give the show away—to say anything about me at all! Well," he spoke with calm

philosophy, "it won't hurt me. I can't be painted any blacker, and——"

"Good God!" cried Adela, marching across the room until she stood by him, "tell me straight what you do mean."

"I mean to take you abroad for a little honeymoon tour. The honey of the moon does not last. What else did you expect?" He carefully put some ash from his cigar into a tray by him. "Mrs. Norton"—Adela gave a moan and hid her face in the cushions—"told me why you were coming over; for adventure, she said—to get hold of a man with money. 'She's sporting,' I said when I heard that; 'she shall have adventure if I can tolerate her,' and here we are! You shall have what you want, and I am infatuated about you. You are coming with me to Dover on Saturday, and then we can go anywhere you like until we are bored, then good-by and no——"

Adela had turned away while he was speaking. She was determined to hear all he had to say. She had hidden her face in her hands; she stooped over the table. Once or twice her shoulders had quivered, otherwise she had given no sign of hearing him.

"Go," she said, standing erect. "Go at once. Listen to me. I believe that I could not put any fear of God nor of man into you; I am certain you will think that I am lying, but, as sure as I know that I shall die, I never knew, until you so graphically informed me, that you did not want to marry me. I would never have tolerated you for five minutes if I had thought that! I was criminal, for I would have married you for your money,—just for your money, God help me,—because I am poor. Now I am free and you can go! I am free!"

"You must have known what——"

"How could I have known anything? I never met anyone at all like you before."

"You were simple, genuine, and I thought you an actress."

"You thought I was clever, deep; well, I am not. I can't bear any more. Can't you see that I loathe you? I despise myself. I see what they meant, the shame of it. Did you tell Mr. Crossley?"

"Did I tell whom?"

"Did you tell Mr. Crossley that I was an adventuress? Did you tell him all Gerty told you?—that I was trying to sell myself for money? What did you tell him?" She swept across the room and faced him. She was no longer bowed with shame and horror. She spoke with the insistence of the woman who would know. "Answer me."

"I may have hinted my suspicions to him."

"Your suspicions," she repeated.

He could not tell whether she spoke angrily or sorrowfully. She handed him his ring. He stood irresolutely by the door.

"Go, please," said Adela quietly.

"I'll never come back again. You have spent all your money; you have no one to help you. You are throwing away your last card, remember."

"You won't believe me when I tell you I don't care. I see what a fool I have been. The career of the adventuress is over—go!"

And he went.

She looked round the room. Was it really true? Had he said all those awful things? She buried her face, for the hot shame on it hurt her. He was gone, gone forever, and but for the detestable way of getting rid of him she could have rejoiced honestly. The next day she would leave the Metropole; she would get cheap lodgings and write stories; she would support herself; she must wash out the shame, the ignominy, the beastliness she felt in her soul. To think that he— In her heart she knew it was her own fault, but that knowledge hurt her most.

Nancy Furnival knew that Mrs. Percy was engaged to Mr. Savage. She detested him. She had not informed Adela of that fact. Nancy was not surprised to hear that the hastily arranged marriage was broken off.

"I am leaving the Metropole and going into lodgings," said Mrs. Percy. "I've engaged rooms in Cambridge Street—near you, Nancy."

"That is the best news I have heard since I came to London," said Miss Furnival.

Adela looked ill, wretched. "I am going to write," she said. "Will you criticise my work?"

"Of course," said the girl kindly. "You look tired out. Do go to bed and have a good rest."

"Rest! I could not rest. I feel goaded; I feel— Oh, my heart is not broken; don't look at me as if you thought me the victim of a hopeless love affair. I must try and get to bed early. As you are the only person I know in London, I think I can manage my evening engagements so that I get to bed early; my distractions won't be many."

Adela did not write to Mr. Crossley. She felt too wretched and too much ashamed to do that. Her lodgings were as cheap as she could find. With great care her money might last until October. She began to write. Driven by the fear of destitution, the ideas would not come to her. When the story was done she took it to Nancy, who decided it would not do for the *Vision*. Then Adela began that most awful of employments, the storming of magazine offices and the interviewing of editors.

The only balm her wounded spirit received in those days was the sight of an insertion in the *Morning Post*:

The Fascinating of Mr. Savage

"The marriage arranged between Mrs. Percy, widow of Captain Bertram Percy, Canadian Regiment, and Mr. Frank Savage, of Castletown Castle, Inverness Lodge, and 400 Park Lane, will not take place."

He had made the only amends possible to her and she was grateful to him, but, as it happened, Nancy had paid for the insertion!

The outside world did not matter much to Adela in those days; it was all dark and lowering. She got no letters except the printed ones, "the Editor regrets," etc., etc.; they were not cheering to receive.

At last her long story was accepted by the *Family Sentinel*. It paid her twenty-five pounds for it, and she took heart, sent for Nancy, and they dined at a funny little French restaurant for one and sixpence; then they, to finish a delirious evening, went to the Haymarket, for which Nancy had stalls.

Adela was growing tired of her dreary surroundings. She had no spare money to decorate her rooms, nor could she buy clean cretonne for the dingy sofa and the chairs. She could afford to eat a little more, but she could not take a holiday; she had to remain in hot, airless London all through August, yet in a way she felt she was working out her salvation; she was paying her score—paying for the awful thing she had done, for that which she had meant to do, to marry Savage simply for the settlements. She vowed to pay bravely. Courage was the virtue she admired most; she would not cry out and be a coward.

Nancy, the proud possessor of a permanent income (she had a post on the *Weekly Argus*; she wrote the fashion column, assisted by Adela, who had an eye for clothes, while Nancy had none), had departed in the early days of hot, sultry August to the seaside. Vainly did she beseech Adela to join her. Mrs. Percy was working; work was the best drug she had found; it left no evil effects. She had no eye for anything except copy, and looked just like a plaintive baby, with her big blue eyes, which had a pathetic air. All through that hot month she slaved until she got—most unromantic of diseases—the chicken-pox.

To an ordinary woman in ordinary circumstances it would have been a bore; to Adela it was an appalling tragedy.

Her landlady was very cross, but bore the blow by raising her tenant's rent and congratulating herself that it was August and the house empty of other lodgers. The doctor's bill, the extras—fruit, milk purveyed by the landlady, not to mention the innumerable bottles of medicine purchased at the chemist's—had reduced Adela's small store of money in a most alarming way. She was very weak; she felt shockingly ill, and she counted her pennies and her shillings whenever she gave herself time to think. Her work dragged and failed. It was

poor and weak. Had she been left to herself she would not have had a doctor, nor any of the hundred and one things which had cost so much. The bill for beef-tea meat read as if she had used a whole ox.

Her short stories came back to the fold. There was no one to tell her that no editor was in town to read the gems sent to him by struggling aspirants. Everyone who could had left London. She felt as if the Day of Judgment were dawning, and as if she were alone, cold, and done for. Desperation and the success of one story goaded her to get up and work. The work was feeble. The *Family Sentinel* refused the next story she sent it. It was not on the same interesting lines to please its readers; there was not enough love in it; it felt sure Mrs. Percy could ultimately please them, which sentiment, though satisfactory, did not pay her bills.

September brought Nancy back to town. She was full of new ideas, new schemes for the autumn campaign. She attributed Adela's sepulchral gloom to her illness. If she had known, it was caused by meals of tea and bread in the cheapest shop Adela could find, varied by visits to the pawn-shop, which were neither cheering nor conducive to a supply of endless gayety. Nancy was too busy to bother, Adela was too desperate to want anyone near her. She merely yearned to crawl out and die alone. The memory of Mr. Crossley, the man she loved, was always with her, and remorse, that dogging wolf, came and stayed by her. In trying to grasp the rich man she had seized the blackguard. The aching longing to hear Harold Crossley's voice, to touch his hand, never left her. She grew half frantic in the evening listening, listening, for a step that never came, that never could come. The dull echo of each footfall in the street hurt her like a blow; she winced as if she had been struck; but no one came.

Mrs. Percy never went to the Metropole for letters, she had struck straight off that trail; she never meant to go back to it again; but there were many letters waiting for her. Gerty had written; Mrs. van Ingen had called there, but did not see the woman who could refuse Mr. Savage. She believed the notice in the *Morning Post*, so did Mr. Crossley; he wrote several times and at last went to the Metropole; no one knew where Mrs. Percy had gone. Adela might be in her grave for all they knew. In faraway Canada Mrs. Norton had qualms of conscience, for Clara van Ingen had spared no detail when giving her opinion of Mrs. Percy, and Gerty gathered that it was what she had said, not what Adela had done, which had produced such a torrent of wrath. Gerty felt ashamed of herself; she knew she had been a brute; she knew there was a tragic mystery surrounding Adela's disappearance, but she made no endeavor to find out her dwelling-place nor her method of earning a living. In course of time the Metropole sent Mrs. Percy's letters to the Dead Letter Office. Gerty received hers and Mr. Crossley received his.

By the end of October Adela had pawned everything she possessed worth anything, and when she paid her landlady she had exactly five shillings in the world. She gave up her rooms. Her writing had not produced what she had anticipated. She had arranged her future hopefully, calculating that if she could write one story in a month and get twenty-five pounds for it she could easily do that every month. The arithmetic was correct, but her stories did not sell. She left her one trunk at Waterloo Station, and with five shillings in her pocket she journeyed to take counsel with Nancy Furnival. She felt a hopeless, hideous failure; her heart and her spirit were weary; life was pain—a great, lonely stretch of pain.

V.

TO REALIZE the terror of London to a woman who is alone and penniless is difficult for those who have never had to face the world on five shillings, with no hope.

Mrs. Percy sat in an armchair in Nancy's flat. When she had arrived Nancy was still out, but the porter, who knew her well, let her in with his key. Mrs. Percy was wet and cold; it was a chilly October day, and the rain, driven by a cutting east wind, was sweeping down the empty streets, whirled by the gale.

Mrs. Percy had not seen much of Nancy. They were both busy. Adela had been careful not to ask Nancy to lunch or to tea, for half the time she did not have either meal—a bun and a glass of milk was all she allowed herself. Nancy had no time to go and see her friend, and she felt certain that Adela had a few friends with whom she amused herself. Nancy had heard of the existence of Mrs. van Ingen, but not of her disappearance from the scene. "Gay and busy do not mix," said Miss Furnival learnedly, and she let Mrs. Percy alone.

Adela had been trying to coin gold out of brains and desperation. They are not of much use in a mint. Nancy had no idea that she was destitute; she thought that the woman whom she admired so much had an assured income, which, even if it were small, would keep the wolf of despair from her door. Besides, Nancy was not curious.

At last she walked in.

"I'm here, Nancy," said Mrs. Percy. "Can you give me your sofa to sleep on to-night? I'm adrift. To-morrow I shall go and look for a situation of some sort. What would I do for?"

"I have just been to see you. Why have you left your rooms? I've some news for you. Greaterex says he might use some stuff of yours. Send him a bundle in the morning, will you?"

"I am a failure."

"Rubbish! you only want a cup of tea."

"It is true, I am ruined. I have spent every penny I possess in this world. They said I was an adventuress. Well, it is true."

"The career of an adventuress would be an uncomfortable one to take up," said Nancy. "It wants so much courage and capital. You know you don't mean it."

"Yes, I do—I do." Then Adela told the whole story, told Nancy everything that had happened since she left Canada.

"I'll make some tea," said Nancy. "It will clear our brains. You must get some work at once. What are you fit for?"

"I don't know," said Adela. "I'll answer advertisements."

"I know what you will do now," said Nancy, "and that is, go to bed. You are worn out. Drink your tea, put on my dressing-gown, and get into my bed."

"I won't." Adela spoke with decision. "I'll sleep on your sofa, but if you offer me your bed, if you dare to offer it, I'll go—I'll go at once."

Nancy laughed. "Very well, you can have the sofa, but it is much more comfortable than my bed."

Soon Adela was actually resting. She was at peace, she was warm and comfortable. The howling wind outside yelled despair, poverty, and destitution; for the first time in six months she did not care.

The old woman who came to get Nancy's breakfast and do her room, for the munificent sum of five pence an hour, was dispatched to buy newspapers. Adela turned her attention to studying their columns and made plans for seeking a situation. First she resolved to go to West Kensington; someone there was advertising for a housekeeper.

"A LADYLIKE PERSON wanted at once as housekeeper. Good wages to suitable applicant. Apply 24 Tregar Road, West Kensington."

Nancy had found what she thought would be a far better place; a tea-shop in Holborn was advertising for lady agents to sell its teas.

"It wouldn't be half bad," said Nancy as she ate her toast and read advertisements. "You get a directory and you find out the names of all the best people in the neighborhood. Then you ring the bell with the assurance of an acquaintance, you ask for the lady of the house, see her, talk tea; she probably buys a pound; you get paid for it, give her a receipt, and that is how it is done. I really believe it pays. They give a good percentage. You could manage it all right."

"If they thought I suited them," said Adela wistfully. "It is all so easy in theory."

"There is always that disturbing if; it is a wicked word." Nancy seized her fountain pen and rushed out.

Adela started with a long list. The West Kensington residence

was hard to find. It did not look as if a housekeeper could be required for such a small establishment. There was no need to ring the bell; the door was open, the hall was crowded; women were standing on the mat, down the steps, unable to force an entrance; they were sitting inside on the stairs; Adela felt sure they had even got up to the roof. They were closely packed together. They glared as each new applicant joined the throng. Some were pretty. There was a gayety too loud to be real about them. Some were haggard and worn; they looked goaded by fear and by want.

"That look hasn't got on my face yet," thought Adela. "It is only in my soul now; it will soon show, and then——"

Great, awful, paralyzing despair showed in many faces. To some the doors were always shut. They all looked anxious, and Adela shivered. The suffering, the stolid misery, showed her what she would come to.

At last a man came down the stairs. He asked questions; he told them to move up, and they crushed together closely; he shut the front door. He was a dark, wretched-looking little person. He walked round, speaking, looking, just as if these women were slaves in a market or as if he were buying cattle. He sent five or six into a room on the left. Adela wished she could shrink and crawl out of the front-door crack and run away.

He came up to her.

"Will you follow those ladies in there?" he said, "I would like to speak to you."

She did as he asked. They were the selected band and they all were good-looking. That was not pleasing to Mrs. Percy. What about the talent for housekeeping? He asked no questions about it. Most of the others were hastily leaving.

The ugly little man took each one into a little office. Some were quickly dismissed, others stayed with him longer. Adela could not hear a word of what was said.

"I'm going," whispered a pretty girl. She sat on the grubby sofa—the place was filthy—beside Adela. "I don't like this; I don't like the look of him. Housekeeper!" she repeated with derision,—“a fine housekeeper he wants!” She turned to depart.

"Do you think he wants a housekeeper for himself?" Adela clutched her arm. "I thought he must be an agent of some sort."

"I don't know what he wants, but I don't like the look of him," answered the girl quietly. "You're not his line. Don't you give him your name nor address. I'm off. I won't wait. I was a fool to come here, but I'd be a bigger one if I stayed!"

At last it was Adela's turn for an interview.

"I hope you are not tired," said the man politely as he gave her

a chair. He seated himself very close to her. "You came in answer to my advertisement?"

"Yes," said she faintly.

"I want a housekeeper. I may as well be frank. I am a married man. My wife does not live with me, and I am cruelly lonely. I have suffered." He spoke in a semi-tragic tone; Adela did not like it, it was affected; he edged his chair nearer hers and put his arm along the back of the one on which she sat. "I want a charming lady to amuse me, to look after things for me; I have a beautiful flat at Earl's Court. If you could call again about six o'clock I would take you to see my rooms. His arm was gradually slipping off the back of her chair. She knew she ought to say something, but her tongue was tied by fright.

"I would not keep house for a man," she said firmly.

"I am prepared to pay liberally. You would not have any menial work to do; I would see that a lady, who fulfilled my requirements, had all she desired."

"I could not do that, so I had better say good-morning."

"Don't go. I have taken quite a fancy to you and I feel sure you would suit. Come back and see my flat before you decide. Come this evening about six——"

"No, thank you; good-morning," and she walked out.

So much for the housekeeper's post. The harmless one of selling tea was left, so she hailed an omnibus and went to Holborn. The tea warehouse was equally crowded, but the man was civil and business-like.

"We require security," he said. "One hundred pounds would do."

"Then I won't, for I haven't one hundred pence," said Adela.

The other places on her list were in different parts of London—undaunted, she went to each one. There was no success anywhere. She had no security, no capital, little experience, and so, at six o'clock, she was tired, hungry, and faint; she had eaten nothing since breakfast and she had not found anything to do. What a fool she was! A housemaid's place was the very thing for her; housemaids were needed. It was too late to go to a registry office; she resolved to go to one at ten o'clock the next morning.

She dined on a poached egg and two bananas. She had no intention of going back to Nancy until the girl's dinner was over. Adela accepted the sofa, houseroom, and breakfast, but she would not dine at the Hen Run.

"It was a hopeless day," said Nancy. She considerably refrained from saying, "How ghastly you look!" which had been her first impulse. Adela's depressed air and slow conversation told the result of her excursions.

"I ought to have realized that with no training there was no place in the world for me; even my school-teaching before I married would not be any help to me here. How could I sell tea? or be in a show room? or do complexion treatment? They all want a premium or security or something in the shape of money. I might have thought of it this morning. Nancy, I am going to be the one thing in this world that is wanted—that is, a housemaid!"

"You will never stand it."

"I am strong."

"Think of living with the other servants!"

"I'll go to a small house."

"And have to carry up the coal!"

"Well, my arms are stout; I could do that at a pinch."

The registry office had plenty of situations on its books. Housemaids were needed and Adela rejoiced. She saw a lady who was willing to pay twenty pounds a year. She engaged Adela, provided the references were satisfactory. The lady made an appointment to call on Miss Furnival the next afternoon. Alas! when the seeker of a housemaid came she climbed the two flights of stone stairs which led to Miss Furnival's abode and arrived there in a bad temper. Then she refused to take a servant from such a little flat. She feared that Adela could not be sufficiently trained. When Adela told her she was not living with Nancy as a servant the lady's wrath knew no limit.

She had been deceived. Adela was a wicked woman who was trying to worm her way into respectable houses by means of a fraudulent reference. She would inform the registry office at once; it had no business to have such a person on its books. That part of her assertion she faithfully carried out, for the evening post brought a letter to say the registry office had removed Adela Percy's name from its lists and could not assist her to find a situation.

Mrs. Percy clenched her teeth and said nothing. Nancy stormed.

"It is no good," said Adela. "Nothing is any good. Waterloo Bridge is the only place for me now."

"I will go and explain."

"Leave it alone, it is only another block in the traffic," said Mrs. Percy. She tried to be gay, but another day of the same adventures, the same disappointments, reduced her proud spirit to pulp. That evening all she said was, "No luck," and Nancy considerably asked no questions.

"I brought you a *Lady's Friend*," said Miss Furnival as they were going to bed. "You may find something in it."

"Listen, Nancy," cried Adela after some moments of anxious reading, "I am going to see them." She read:

"WANTED—A lodge-keeper, the widow of a soldier killed in action preferred. Must be young and very active. Wages, £1 1s. a week, coal and light provided. Apply personally on Monday morning at Messrs. Graves & Gudgeon's, 44 Bedford Row, W. C."

"A lodge-keeper! But your husband was not a soldier."

"An officer, a distinction without a difference. I am strong and active. What papers have I? The notice of his death: 'I regret to inform you that your husband, Bertram Percy, Canadian Regiment, was killed at Pardeberg on the 30th of January.' Won't that do? That is proof enough, and you'll do for a respectability reference this time."

"The paper does not say where the lodge is."

"What does it matter? It says one pound and one shilling a week, think of that! and fuel and light! I'll go if they will have me. I hope I may get it; I hope I may."

VI.

It was a cold day early in November. Adela Percy got out of a third-class carriage at Hambledon Station. She had one little trunk which contained her worldly goods. Nancy had given her the money to buy two black and white print dresses, some aprons, and shoes."

"I've started," she said to herself, "on another track."

Her heart was beating with terror of the unknown. It seemed weeks since she had interviewed Messrs. Graves & Gudgeon and then had been summoned by Mr. Walters, the steward of Springfield. Everything had been settled slowly but securely. Mr. Walters had engaged her and told her what she would have to do.

"Nancy, I've got the book of the words." This was after the final interview. "I am engaged as lodge-keeper at Springfield. I have to keep the gate tidy. There is a small garden. 'Do you know how to work in the garden?' said that confiding man. Now, do I?"

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'That depends on what you put in the garden.' That was judicious, wasn't it? It's all right. He sends one of the under-gardeners down to lay it out—that sounds as if they were preparing me for burial—in the spring and in the autumn, and I have just got to weed it. I can weed. I have to be ready to open the gate at any time. Fancy me in the middle of the night, with my martial cloak around me, flying out; they supply the cloaks, and they have hoods; they are made of scarlet. I can wear scarlet.

'I shall go brave in scarlet,
I shall be bold in red.'

"Who owns Springfield?"

"Mr. Bridlington."

"You will be very lonely at night."

"No, I won't. There will be a pay-day to sustain me. Think of knowing that my money will come with the regularity of Saturday morning! That will be bliss. The only checks I have had have been drawn on the bank of life, and though the world owes me a living, the checks are always returned to me marked 'refer to drawer.'"

In spite of Adela's gayly assumed confidence in the future she stood on the station platform a forlorn figure, huddled up in a cloak. Hope and the pride of life had left her.

"Is there a cart here from Springfield?" she said to the solitary porter.

"Yes, outside. Shall I take your box?"

"Please do."

There was a tax-cart waiting. The step looked as high as the wall of a garden. A young groom was driving.

"You are Mrs. Percy?—for Springfield?" he asked. "Jump up. Lots of room for the luggage behind Jim."

She presented the porter with sixpence and they drove off.

She could not talk; she sat there tongue-tied.

At last he spoke. "How do you think you will like it down here? Ever been lodge-keeper before?"

"No. I think I'll like it."

"Me and my Missis live at the farther lodge. She has been cleaning yours. Mr. Bridlington had it all painted and done up for you. There's a bit of furniture in it; it is rough, but it is clean. It isn't a bad billet. It's lonely a little and you never can leave your gate. Did they tell you that?"

"Then how can I do my shopping?"

"The baker calls, so does the butcher; they send milk from the farm. The other stuff—well, I buy tea and bits of things for my Missis on Saturday night. I can get you anything you need then."

"Thank you," said Adela. "What is the name of my lodge?"

"The East Lodge, Springfield Park. You have to carry the post-bag up to the Big House every afternoon. The post-man goes in the morning, but at four he leaves the bag at your door and you have to take it up. You won't mind that?"

"I won't mind anything. I'm so glad to be in the country."

"You lost your husband in the war?"

"Yes." For the rest of the way no one spoke.

The East Lodge was built of gray stone. It was covered with the bare branches of rose-trees. There were two flower-beds in front of the door—the bulbs were already sprouting in them.

"It's pretty in summer," he said. "It looks dreary now."

A young woman came to the door, evidently the man's "Missis."

Adela and she carried in the trunk. There was a good fire in the kitchen; a front room was arranged as a sitting-room—just the stiff cottage arrangement which no doubt was considered the correct thing in the circles Adela had joined. Upstairs there were two large bedrooms.

Mrs. Frame was young and pretty; she poured out all her troubles to Adela: a two-year-old child and a baby of a few months; the small quarters were trying, and the fear that the increasing family would make Mr. Bridlington turn them out was a constant worry to her and to Bill, the husband.

"Since old Mr. Bridlington died nothing has been altered," said Mrs. Frame. "They say the heir, his nephew, will just keep things as they were, but I'm afraid, and so is Bill. Well, now, if you think you don't want me any more I must go home. Our lodge is about half a mile across the park. Come over to-morrow when you take up the post-bag. Oh, here's your cloak. Mr. Walters sent it down." She put on her own red one with the hood.

"How pretty you look!" said Adela involuntarily.

Mrs. Frame laughed. "I expect you've seen better days," she said, gazing at Adela. "They did say Mr. Walters told someone that you were a lady. I begin to think it is true."

Adela was left alone to find out things for herself. The cottage had been newly papered with simple flower papers. The paint was white. It was all bare and sweet and clean. She unpacked and then made herself a cup of tea. She found bread and butter in the little larder and some fresh eggs, so she boiled one and then cleared away the things and washed them up. It was delightful, just like playing at keeping house.

She aired her sheets—Nancy had lent her three—and made up the bed in the top front room. It faced south and was nearest the road.

She sat down by the fire to think and to feel glad before she went to bed. First she had to save up and pay Nancy, then—well, then she would feel free again and out of debt. She went to bed after locking the windows and the doors. She had reached a haven, a haven of peace; it was good to feel at rest.

An uneventful circuit of days rolled by. She did her own work; she learned, taught by Mrs. Frame, to wash her own clothes; at first she had only scrubbed the skin off her hands; she cleaned and sang and was happy. Her red cloak and hood were very becoming to her; health and work and food were giving her a color; she was better looking than she had ever been before, but she did not think of it. Nancy had promised to come down as soon as she could get away. Adela had the house cleaned over and over again and her room ready. She found plenty

of employment and she never felt dull, though sometimes she did feel solitary. Mrs. Frame had accepted her as a lady and came down to advise and to help. Adela saw no one else. She found she could help her kind adviser by going up and taking the baby to spend the day with her. Her writing prospered in the peace of the country, and the editor of the *Family Sentinel* was glad to accept her story and to ask for more. Then she paid Nancy.

One afternoon late in December Adela got a shock. The days were very dark. She had lighted her lamp and was playing with Mrs. Frame's baby when she heard a shout of "Gate!"

She seized her key,—all the gates at Springfield were kept locked,—threw on her red cloak, and rushed out.

"Gate!" yelled a man impatiently again.

"Coming, sir," called Adela, using the word she had been drilling herself to say for some time. In her haste she left the front door open; the fire-light was dancing, the child was crawling about, and the interior of her room showed as clearly to the man on the horse as if he had been inside it.

She supposed it was Mr. Bridlington returning from hunting. She opened the gate as quickly as possible and waited for him to pass through. He rode close beside her, so close that his horse almost touched her. She felt his eyes on her face; it was clear in the light from the cottage door. She gave him a cursory glance and did not raise her eyes again, for he was looking at her; he was staring hard at her. She knew him. It was Mr. Crossley! He had not recognized her; he would not be able to do that. She pulled her hood over her face. He was staying at the Big House. Oh, how she hoped he would soon go away!

"Good-night," he said as he rode away.

"Good-night, sir," said Adela. She said the "good-night" quietly and the "sir" loudly. If only the ground would swallow her! But perhaps he had not seen her face. He gave a glance at the open door of the cottage as he rode by it.

Adela went in. She had lost her gayety. What did anything matter? She did not, she would not, believe she had seen Mr. Crossley. Her heart said she had seen him. She could afford to laugh at her heart. She felt gay, shaking, nervous, and apprehensive all at once.

Two or three days passed and she heard and saw nothing of him; either he was not there or else he had forgotten all about her.

There was a large party staying at the Big House, and she had to open the gate frequently to men who were going to or coming back from the meet.

After this Adela was never alone. She always had one of the Frame children with her; to be alone meant she had time and opportunity for thought.

"Mr. Bridlington was asking me if you had any children," said Bill when he came one afternoon to fetch the baby home. "I suppose he saw you with one of mine."

"I would not know Mr. Bridlington if I saw him," she said. "I suppose I have opened the gate for him."

"Well, I'd better be taking the youngster home; good-night, Ma'am," and Bill stumped off.

She sat by the fire. She was tired of writing and she had done all the work in the house for that day. It was queer how Jim and his wife called her "Ma'am;" they seemed to think she belonged to a different world; they never asked any questions. They were the good old stuff and respected her. How lucky she had been to get the lodge and to come to Springfield to be alone, for no one whom she could have liked would have associated with her under the circumstances; Bill and his wife were kind and friendly, but never intimate.

The tea-things were still on the table. She felt loath to stir. Time—which had lulled the memory of the past torture and poverty to rest in her mind—brought back the consciousness of the happiness she had missed. She ached to have a little of it. She was young. She saw her past life, that bald dream of happiness, which had not materialized, with her husband Bertram; he had not loved her. She was strong; she would live until she was ninety or a hundred, shunted on the way-side! She had peace and calm, but no love, no happiness. And she knew that she would never have it.

She looked at the room. It was dainty. She had valiantly eschewed the temptation to have tea, as if she were in a station with the train going to start; she had a little tea-table with a white cloth on it, dull blue cups and saucers, and a blue tea cosey. The fire in the grate was good and the brasses shone; she cleaned them well every day. The sofa, changed from a hideous monstrosity into a beautiful resting-place by blue and white chintz and blue and pink cushions, was near the fire; a few prints on the walls were all of ships; she had picked them up in Hambledon on one of the few occasions Mr. Walters had given her a day off to go shopping. She loved the sea—the sea which had thrown her what she wanted and she had not accepted the gift. A queer old picture of Fame was on the narrow, high chimney-piece, and a china dog, hideous but beloved, was there too. Two old brass candlesticks left by the last inhabitant of the lodge held candles; the room was not what one would have expected to see in a four-roomed cottage. She wore a black and white print gown and a large white apron. The gown fitted her; she had a beautiful figure; the dress was plain and a little long, a band of insertion went round her throat; in theory she was arrayed like an upper housemaid, plainly and

perfectly; in practice she appeared like a duchess ready to act in private theatricals.

There was a knock at the front door. It opened into the sitting-room. She had not heard anyone call "Gate!" It might be Bill, though he always came to the kitchen door; it might be a parcel, but the postman had gone by. She had no wish that any curious, casual person should pry into her room and so into her life,—a room is often the open book of a woman's heart; the big table in the corner, covered with manuscript, showed she had a different profession from the ordinary dweller in a lodge. She opened the door; there stood a man—a man. It was Mr. Crossley!

"Did you want me to open the gate, sir?"—the sir was faint—said Adela from behind the entrenchment of the door. "I will do it at once."

"I have come to see you. Don't pretend you don't know me. I recognized you in the half-light the other night; I have not been able to get away from Pitts and the others since then. I have something to say, and I can say it better if you will allow me to come in. Some passer-by might wonder to whom you are talking if you keep me to cool on the doorstep."

"Come in, then. Not that I care what they say, but I should hate any gossip. You are staying at the Big House?"

"I am. What a greeting! Aren't you glad to see me? I have tried to find you everywhere. I am more than glad to come across you here in safety."

She gripped the back of a chair. She had to hold on to something. She felt as if he had brought a warrant for her execution.

"You will tell—you will tell who I am and where you met me; you will ruin me." She stopped. "Do you know"—her tone was quiet yet full of woe—"that before I came here I nearly starved?—that I was driven to it? You will tell Mr. Bridlington and he will turn me out. Oh, what am I saying?"

"Is that your opinion of me?"

"No, you might do it accidentally. If you knew what torture meant and then after it peace, you would—— Please go away from here and don't come back again."

"I promise to say nothing about you to anyone. But they were all talking about you. Pitts saw you one day when you brought up the letters. He——"

"He can do as he likes; I don't mind what he says."

"Why won't you treat me as a friend? Have I ever been anything else?"

"No. Don't you see that I must live my life quietly? If anyone

had seen you coming here now they would say—— I am alone; I have no one in the whole of God's earth to take any care for me, and——"

"I quite see. And now sit down. I can't until you do. I have brought you a message from Mr. Bridlington. I come in peace, not in war."

"Why does Mr. Bridlington use you as a messenger? Sit on the sofa." She smiled, and all the old charm came back and more of it, for she was rounded, happier looking, her eyes shone; she was the Adela he loved again, but he did not look at her because he could not bear to do so. "Have you had any tea?"

"I would like some now."

"I will make it. No, don't come with me. I am used to it."

"Do you mean to say that you do all your own work? You clean the house? Surely you should get some one—some woman—in."

"And let the whole world know I am masquerading? No, thank you. I do everything and I like it." She glanced at him from her big blue eyes shaded by such long lashes. "I really like it, and I think"—she spoke modestly—"that it suits me."

"Yes, it does suit you."

"You will not be able to eat any dinner," she said, laughing, as he ate bread and butter and drank three cups of tea.

"I don't mind that. Besides, we don't dine until a quarter past eight to-night; they expect some people from town."

"And now for the message. Has my master any fault to find with the way I clean the yard? or open the gate? or weed the flower-beds? There are no weeds in winter."

"Your master has no fault to find with you. He hates the fate which sent you here, for he knows that you are not strong enough for this life. Walters told him all about you. My message is that on Sunday morning, if you would care to go to church, you are welcome to, no one ever wants this gate opened on Sunday. Bill will drive you to Hambledon in the tax-cart and put it up at the Inn, so you can both go to church. Mr. Bridlington thinks you must be lonely and that a little gentle intellectual treat would be good for you."

"It is kind of him and I would like it extremely. I suppose he would not mind if once or twice I stayed with the Frame children and let Mrs. Frame go with her husband? She does want to show her new hat."

"Don't let the exchange take place too often, then I think it will be all right."

"He must be a decent sort. How did he come to think of it?"

"Oh, everyone said you were superior, you know."

"Superior! Is that what they call me? I am not at all superior."

"You are not a typical soldier's wife. Why didn't you speak to me that night you opened the gate for me?"

"Why didn't you speak to me?"

"I looked at you as hard as I dared."

"I looked too until I——"

"Until you let your eyes fall. Shall I tell you why I did not speak?"

"Do."

"No, I think I can't now. I went to Bill Frame and asked questions about you."

"Mr. Bridlington went too, Bill told me."

"Did he?" Mr. Crossley was quite indifferent.

He stayed until it seemed as if he would have to run to get back and dress for dinner at a quarter-past eight. "May I come again?"

"No, thank you."

"I must and I will. Let me come in a week."

"Well, then, in a week."

"A whole week is awfully long. Couldn't you let me come on Wednesday—this is Thursday—on Monday; that is a good day, and you can tell me how you liked going to church."

"No, this day week. I have work to do and visitors are unsettling."

"I wish I could unsettle you, you are as firm as a rock," he remarked sadly.

"Will you give Mr. Bridlington my humble respects or my humble duty and thanks for his kindness? I don't know how I ought to phrase it; tell him my humble duty and thanks, that sounds best."

She made him a courtesy, she would not shake hands with him.

"When you are serious you are so much more dangerously attractive than when you are laughing. Don't make me a courtesy again. I think, before I go, that it is only fair to tell you I am Mr. Bridlington."

"You are Mr. Bridlington! What have you done with your other name?"

"The old man was my uncle, and he left all he had to my brother and myself on condition we took the name. I did not tell you in town because I did not know whether it were really true."

"Wait," she called,—“wait; I want to ask you if you knew—did you know who Mrs. Percy was? Was I taken here out of pity? Did you tell Graves & Gudgeon?"

"No."

"Then it was not your charity?"

"No. They sent me a list of names. I saw Mrs. Percy. They said you seemed suitable. I wrote, from purely sentimental reasons, 'take Mrs. Percy if possible.' To tell you the truth, I could not bear to think of anyone with your name being destitute. Then I forgot all about it until you opened the gate. In a week I will answer any more questions you may have ready; I'll be shockingly late now."

He vanished round the back of the lodge and into the path which led to the Big House.

VII.

ADELA, alone, was amazed and ashamed. He said the engaging of Mrs. Percy was inspired by purely sentimental reasons! Everything was lurid, yet it was lurid with joy. And then joy crept away from her mind and astonishment and sorrow took its place. The sorrow came in because she knew she would not be able to renew her friendship with him. A landowner cannot know his lodge-keeper, and contraband visits she must not permit, though the idea of any sort of a visit from him filled her with rapture; still, she could not be labelled again. "You were an adventuress," shouted something inside her brain; "you will be an adventuress again—first for money and then for love." Some horrid little goblin laughed as he said it. What was the good of being a woman at all? The situation was an impossible one; she could not have any further intercourse with Mr. Bridlington. He would understand; perhaps he scorned her now, perhaps— The ceaseless repetition of questions filled her brain, and they crowded out her panacea for all worries, work. Oh, to forget, and when she slept she said, "I will forget," and when she woke she knew that she remembered.

Bill called for her on Sunday morning and they drove to Hambleton. The seats set apart for the servants of the Big House were on the side of the church. The remainder of the congregation had a very good view of them all. Mr. Bridlington sat in the front of the church and looked at her. She resolved that the next Sunday should find her sitting down by the door, where she could see and not be seen.

Once he did not look at her; she gazed at him; he was hard, brown, and strong; his hands were well shaped and his eyes were keen.

A whole week passed and he did not come near her. Some men think a woman likes to be obeyed: she does not, if she care for the man. To disregard her orders needs a certain amount of audacity and self-confidence.

The next Sunday morning Adela asked the old pew-opener to give her a seat by the door. That afternoon the rattle of wheels and a shout of "Gate!" brought her out; it was Mr. Bridlington driving, Mr. Pitts was with him.

She opened the gate and stood there waiting for them to go out—she did not dare lift her eyes. He did not go on.

"I was sorry to see you were not in church this morning," said he. "I hope you were not ill."

"No, sir," said Adela faintly. Then, not wishing him to think her ungrateful, that she had not taken advantage of the trap so thoughtfully placed at her disposal, also afraid lest the privilege of an undis-

turbed contemplation of his straight back and his head where the hair crinkled a little should be taken away from her,—this was wrong of her,—she said: "I was there. I sat in the back of the church; I like it better. I am very grateful to you for letting me go."

He drove on. She shut and locked the gate.

"I say, Bridlington, you have a beauty in your lodge! Is she the victim of an uncontrollable passion for you?" asked Mr. Pitts. "Why does she live here? Why does——"

"Oh, go and ask her," answered his host with impatience. "She is a widow; her husband was killed in South Africa. I can't do much; you know I tried to go with every contingent they sent from Canada? Yes, but they would not have me, so all I can do is to give the widows of soldiers work when there is any going. That is why she is in the East Lodge."

"I must take a little walk there, become faint, and then she'd have to take me in; she——"

"I beg you won't do anything of the sort," said Mr. Bridlington stiffly. "She would resent it."

"Now, look here," said Pitts, "you know that I would call on any pretty woman in the neighborhood. "Why shouldn't I call on her? What difference does the fact of her living in the lodge make? She is a lady."

"Of course."

"Then I shall call on her." Pitts spoke with determination. "If she resents my intrusion, I'll come away. She can only fire a saucepan at me," he added with comfortable assurance; "I understand that is what they do when they quarrel in the married quarters in barracks. She isn't a soldier's widow; you've been swindled! She's in love with some man down here and she is only masquerading; she may be hiding from justice, she——"

"Don't be a fool," said Mr. Bridlington concisely, and Mr. Pitts was silent, but he thought all the more.

The Rector of Hambleton church had noticed the new beauty in the Springfield pew. On Wednesday afternoon, having made inquiries as to the locality in which the lady resided and her station in life, he started to go to the East Lodge to pay a parochial visit. He had heard she was a superior person, evidently in great trouble, having lost her husband in South Africa.

The Reverend Augustus Ponsonby believed in celibacy of the clergy, candles, and incense. He was a very handsome man and a great favorite in the parish. He found Mrs. Percy preparing her tea. He saw her room and he was surprised; he admired her lithe figure, her glorious eyes, and heavy black hair; he stayed to tea—stayed to tea with the lodge-keeper; he never had tea even with the farmers' wives! He

forgot all about her profession as he watched and listened to her. She was so delightfully fresh, different; she did not ask him about the hangings, nor the reredos, nor about any of the things that all ladies of the parish kept on tap for him. How tired he was of the subject! How weary of conversation about missions! He was not shocked when she refused to take a class in his Sunday-school and said she did not want to.

The master of Springfield had been keeping a tight hand on his inclinations. He wanted to go down to the lodge every day and all day. He knew very well that such a course would be foolish. He was perfectly aware of all the difficulties of the situation; he knew how people would talk if they saw him visiting the pretty lodge-keeper. He had his own reasons for preventing the smallest breath of scandal attaching itself to her, and of those reasons she knew nothing. Therefore he surrounded himself with a large party. He had invited a lady down to whose charms Mr. Pitts was the last victim; this was a good way of keeping Pitts out of mischief. Pitts resented these efforts on his behalf and was restive; Mr. Bridlington watched him.

One night after everyone had gone to bed the two men were in the smoking-room. "It is of no use your following me and watching me, Bridlington. I know why it is, and you know that I want to go down to the lodge to see that charming woman; I warn you I'll go as soon as I have a chance. You can't watch me forever, and so you can just lump it."

"Do think of her!"

"I've been doing nothing else ever since I saw her. The way those eyelashes lay on her cheek: it was too awfully lovely. How you can be so impervious to eyelashes I do not understand. I would have given my best horse to have seen her eyes, and——"

"You ought not to think about her."

"You want to keep her for yourself, you——"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't get huffy," said Pitts with excessive geniality. "I know you are not——"

Mr. Bridlington interrupted him. "I meant you should think of Mrs. Percy's reputation; no one must see you going there. If she were to be talked about, it would—it would kill her. You can go and see her if you like, but think of her! She has had an awful life—grief, poverty, pain, and distress; let her be, she is in a haven now."

"Don't you want to go and see her?"

"Always, though I don't go. She told me not to come."

"And she despises you now for obeying her. You've been?"

"Once."

"I intend to discover for myself whether she is a designing minx

or a suffering angel; I'll escape your tender care," and Mr. Pitts grinned with great joviality.

All the house party had gone away. They found Springfield dull, its owner was preoccupied; they did not understand how he could be, with his sudden accession of fortune and their priceless society added to it. Harold had only the society of Mr. Pitts, whom he had besought to stay; certainly Pitts accepted with great alacrity. The truth was that Harold felt he dared not be alone with the lodge and Mrs. Percy so near; there were scandalous tongues everywhere. He wanted to go to her; a dawning hope in his mind made him put the break on, down the hill of Aspiration, and stay away. "You're going too quick, my son," said he to himself. For he hoped much from Nancy Furnival; her presence at the lodge would make things straight. He felt he could wait for her able assistance.

On the Wednesday afternoon on which the laceration of Mr. Ponsonby's heart took place Mr. Bridlington went out to ride. He was alone. He had seen the departure of Mr. Pitts early in the afternoon. Pitts went to tea at Lady Esther MacAdam's. Harold had been bidden too,—Lady Esther had daughters,—but he refused to go. He wanted to ride over the downs to the north of Springfield; he felt that a good, long gallop would take some of the restlessness out of his body and his mind.

Riding over the short grass, temptation seized him. What was to prevent his going to her and explaining the situation. His change of name and of circumstances required accounting for. He took his horse back to the stable, and by that time he had quite persuaded himself that Adela would think it very strange he had not been to tell her all these particulars before. He thought he might safely announce, merely as an item of interest, that he loved her as much as ever and that he intended to wait for her to marry him, as long as she had not promised to marry any other man.

The short December day was graying as he went down the path. He then changed his mind; that way of reaching the lodge was too secretive, he took to the avenue. He had no reason to shun making a bold approach to the front door. What did it matter who saw him? He had a perfect right to go to his own lodge. As he reached it he saw a stealthy figure glide out of the shrouding rhododendrons and go close up to the window; evidently, whoever it was wanted to see through the crack of the blind. Here was a clear case for prompt interference by the proprietor of the estate. Harold crept forward and grabbed the window-gazer by the arm. "What do you mean? What are you doing here?"

To his surprise his captive said with amiability: "Shut up! Let go my arm!" It was Pitts, whom he had thought safe with Lady

Esther—Pitts calmly looking through the crack of the blind at Mrs. Percy. He was unrepentant and unalarmed.

"Get out of this," said Mr. Bridlington firmly.

"I won't. I've just as much right here as you have. I told you I meant to come. Don't make a row. Look in! Doesn't she look sweet? An absolutely lovely dream?"

Feeling that he could have scalped his friend and enjoyed his torture with joy indescribable, Bridlington pushed him away to get a chance at the crack himself. He muttered something, but he continued to look.

There was Adela exactly as Pitts had described her; she was knitting. A tea-table, the tea-table of Harold's most precious recollection, was by her, and opposite sat a manifestly infatuated person, the Reverend Augustus Ponsonby. "He's staring at her as if he would like to eat her," remarked he with great disgust.

"Let me see," and Pitts shoved him away. "Don't be so selfish; you want to keep it all for yourself. I say, I think we had better go boldly up to the door and call. If we stay growling out here she'll send the Parson out to look for the dog fight, or perhaps she might throw water at us from the windows—ha! ha!" laughed he loudly, forgetting the need for caution in his amusement.

"Now, what's this? Come, get out of here!" Mr. Bridlington turned with astonishment to find his steward, Walters, standing behind them. "We don't allow tramps here. You'd better move on."

"I—er—er—am just calling on Mrs. Percy on a matter of business," said Harold in a tone of humility, and his words were halting. Mr. Pitts could not speak; he had given way to a paroxysm of laughter.

The embarrassment of Walters was tremendous. "Oh sir! I beg your pardon, I did not know you were here;" his humility was immense. "I just—I often give an eye to the lodge when I am passing. Mrs. Percy does not know, sir, and I won't do it again if it interferes in any way——"

"I hope you will do it as usual, it does not interfere in any way," said Harold. "You are quite right, the place is lonely, too lonely."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," and the steward vanished, but not before Mr. Pitts said gayly, "I too am having my eye on Mrs. Percy."

"Shut up!" said Bridlington. "Come, we'll have to knock at the door now."

VIII.

A DOUBLE knock startled Adela. Mr. Ponsonby jumped; he said with uneasiness, "I must be moving on."

She opened the door, and when she saw the two rather shamefaced visitors said, "Did you want to speak to me?"

"Yes," said Harold. "Did you hear rather a disturbance outside

your window?" He introduced Mr. Pitts and they came in. Adela was not perturbed, she felt secure in the presence of so many people, and she was glad to see him. She forgot that Mr. Ponsonby made talking his profession; he never talked scandal, he only lamented the awful circumstances of some parishioner's fall from grace. He gazed with curiosity at Mr. Bridlington, whom he had wanted to meet. He disapproved of the way Adela received the two men; he disapproved of their coming at all; he disapproved of everything, of his own feelings also. Having just felt that he could almost relinquish his most cherished and attractive conviction, his belief in celibacy of the clergy, if she had been in a different position, an unwonted passion of wrath seized him when these intruders entered. They accepted her offer of tea, and she (forgetting that the past was dead; she had often assured herself of that, and it was queer of her to be so oblivious of what she had hitherto considered an unalterable fact) began to talk to Harold in all the old, attractive way, not at all in the method and on the lines of the woman who looked after the lodge!

"Do you remember the pleasant tea-parties we had on board the *Amsterdam*?" inquired Harold, forgetting the absolute necessity for silence in regard to any former meeting between himself and Mrs. Percy.

"Of course I do," she answered, "and the day you——"

Mr. Pitts coughed and asked if he might have a drink of water. The situation was growing interesting, but he did not intend that Mr. Ponsonby should share any of it. What fools they both were to tell anyone they had met before!

The Rector rose to go. He pressed Mrs. Percy's hand with unnecessary violence and asked Mr. Bridlington for a subscription to the choir fund, which Harold, with great liberality, gave then and there.

They stayed some time after the departure of Mr. Ponsonby. Pitts thought Mrs. Percy was even more charming than he had dared imagine. He was very quiet; he left most of the talking to Harold. Pitts was thinking of the ready-made scandal which the Rector had taken away with him to relate at his next dinner-party.

They walked home just in time for dinner.

"Do you want to marry her?" asked Pitts.

"Yes."

"Well, then, hurry up and tell her so. Can't you muzzle that Parson somehow? He'll tell you knew her before; he will create such a stir as has not been known here since the war with France and they were afraid Bonaparte was coming. You must acknowledge, Bridlington, it sounds fishy. Can't you hear him telling everyone? 'The pretty woman who takes care of Mr. Bridlington's East Lodge is a

former friend of his! He met her on board ship, he goes down to see her after dark,' etc., etc. Can't you guess the rest?"

Harold stopped. "What a fool I was to say anything—a fool to go and see her at all with that prowling hyena about! I never thought there could be danger from him!"

"There is the worst; I have heard of him before."

The next evening the Rector dined at Lady Esther MacAdam's. As a great secret he related his experience when calling on Adela; he lamented the infatuation of Mr. Bridlington; he hoped there would be no disgrace to the county. Lady Esther promised, though shocked, to guard the absorbing item of news safely.

For some days Harold dared not look down the East Avenue. To even drive past the gate he would have considered foolish, so worried was he by Mr. Pitts's words.

"Out in the West," he remarked when Pitts began another sermon on the same text, "no one would have said nasty things about me or about her if I spoke to her, just because she lives there and I live here. I would have shot any man who dared."

"Perhaps so. But you forget the thing that kills the world's continued belief in a woman's virtue is when she, for want of money, is obliged to leave one position and take a lower one. It would not matter if she were ugly. It is odd, but no one would say anything about her if she had taken the Dower House and announced she had met you on board ship. There is nothing they won't say while she inhabits your lodge!"

Harold did not answer these wise remarks. He waited impatiently for Sunday and a sight of her.

The church was full that morning, and in the MacAdams' pew, which was next the Bridlingtons' family sheep-pen, Harold saw Frank Savage!

Mr. Bridlington cast an anxious glance behind him; he could not tell whether she were there; he hoped she had not come, but she had.

She walked over to the Inn to wait for the cart. She stood by the gate, not thinking of the present nor of her surroundings, when she heard a hatefully familiar voice.

"Mrs. Percy, how are you? How strange this is! Are you—is it possible you are the lady of the lodge? The story I heard sounded like a pleasant romance,—untrue, of course,—now it seems somewhat like an unpleasant French novel."

"Since when have you found French novels unpleasant? You used to suggest situations somewhat similar."

"I am staying with Lady Esther MacAdam," he said. "I was awfully amused when I heard you were the lady about whom Lady Esther was telling naughty tales. How brilliant of you to come here!"

To live in his lodge! I was frightfully puzzled at first until I got the book of the words. You were clever." There was sickening admiration in his tone. "I told Lady Esther all about you last night; the history did not sound well in a country place. In London it would be an excellent joke; here—well! She said the whole county would cut Mr. Bridlington—our old friend Crossley!"

"Couldn't you have been silent for once in your life?"

"I had to live up to the names you so kindly bestowed upon me just before we parted. I will come and see you when I can safely get away from the espionage of my hostess;" he dropped his voice cautiously; "I never have forgotten you; I think we might come to terms—now."

"I despise you," said she calmly; she was frightened, but she did not show it. "How did Lady Esther MacAdam know of my existence?"

"Through Mr. Bridlington, I suppose. How can I tell? But don't be angry with him for telling such an excellent joke. I would not have resisted the temptation if I had been in his place. They all know now."

Adela walked into the stable yard of the Inn, where Bill was waiting for her, and got into the trap. She did not speak to him. Once or twice he glanced at her face. Her lips were hard set and she looked as if she had been crying. "I think we might come to terms—now," sounded in ceaseless repetition in her brain. He! That brute! Had Harold told? Never, never would she believe that of him. It must have been that little rat he brought with him. Poor Mr. Pitts!

Late that evening she was working to finish a story, for she knew she would have to go out on the tramp again and would need all the money she could get. "Surely," she thought, "I have paid. There cannot be any more scores to settle." She heard a voice shout peremptorily, "Gate!" She went out; it was after ten o'clock. There stood Mr. Ponsonby.

"Good-evening," said Adela.

"Let me in. I want to talk to you."

"It is too late. You can say what you want to say here."

"I can't talk here."

"Very well, then. If you can't talk from the gate, you can go away and come back to-morrow in the daylight."

"Are you aware that I have heard awful things about you? I must tell you. You knew Mr. Bridlington before; they say you are here for no good."

"I know all that," she answered. "They say that I came over to get married and I am an adventuress."

"I heard him refer to a former acquaintance with you, and so I

told Lady Esther. When I mentioned your name to her there was a man there named Savage; he seemed to have known you."

"When you mentioned my name? So you told her. Did you by any chance add that Mr. Bridlington came here the afternoon you paid your first visit?"

"Yes."

"She knew nothing about me before that?"

"I really do not know. She seemed surprised. Why think about her? Think of yourself; go into a sisterhood, a place where you can think; do take my advice, do——"

"And so you told—you, whose profession is Christ's charity. How could you? I know all you want to say."

"You are in an anomalous position and all these men come to see you; you are beautiful; do be careful."

"I intend to be." She walked away and shut and locked the doors and windows of the cottage, and where he went and what he did she neither knew nor cared. The only redeeming feature of it all was she had so speedily discovered who was the informer. There was no doubt that Mr. Ponsonby was guilty, and also, though his story might have created a certain amount of stir, it would have died away if Frank Savage had not happened to be staying at Lady Esther's.

The next afternoon Mr. Ponsonby returned, and Adela told him the whole history of her life since she landed.

"You may think what you like about me," she said, "but you are not to say things about Mr. Bridlington. They are untrue."

Ponsonby retired somewhat crestfallen. Adela spoke as if she were telling the truth, but he did not believe her, it was a clever, plausible invention. The Rector continued his head-wagging until Mrs. Percy had no rag of reputation left.

The atmosphere of the Big House was sultry; a gloom—a sepulchral gloom—had fallen on Harold, also on Mr. Pitts. The former smoked incessantly and was morose, the latter fidgeted and muttered wrathful words.

"And that scandal-monger is the Rector," said Pitts. "As for Mr. Savage, a few moments alone with him and a horsewhip would give me complete joy. Still, he makes no profession; but Ponsonby, he preaches to us every Sunday."

"You are sure, Pitts, quite sure, that she won't see me?"

"Miss Furnival arrived this morning; I had a little conversation with her. Mrs. Percy absolutely refuses to see anyone. She is broken up, and I don't wonder. Miss Furnival told me what an awful time she has had. If I had a chance, I could knock some of Savage's teeth out and not feel sorry."

Harold grunted. "I'm going to the lodge. I won't sit here."

"She refuses to see you."

"I'll have an interview with Miss Furnival. By the bye, I met Lady Esther yesterday."

"Did you?" Mr. Pitts was interested. "Did she cut you?"

"Not wholly; she halved it."

Harold went to the lodge. It was a long time before the door opened in answer to his knock. When Nancy arrived she said, "She can't see you."

"Come outside and let me talk to you."

"Hanging," said she, "would be too good for Mr. Savage. But who told her name?"

"The Rector."

"I thought you had done that."

"Does she think so?"

"Yes, I fancy she does."

He sighed. He had no words ready; truly, the situation was too ghastly. "Look here, you are her friend. I love her. What are you going to do to help me?"

"I can't see that your loving her does any good. They would only say that the attitude of the county towards you had forced you to marry her. How can you kill the scandal? No one would call on her here."

"I don't want them to. I mean, it does not matter. I am not going to live here forever. The world is wide."

"And tongues are long."

"You must help me to cut them off."

"I'll do my best. You don't deserve it, but I'll work for her. She says she is going away with me when I have to go back to town. She is terrified—terrified lest Mr. Savage may turn up here. He said he would; he was rude, he was insulting."

"I'm glad you told me. I'll look after that."

And so the gamekeepers patrolled round and round the East Lodge. All the people on the estate wondered, and all the world talked scandal. But Harold went out every day to pay visits and Mr. Pitts accompanied him. Sometimes they bunglingly tried to mention the calumnies told of the widow in the East Lodge.

"I don't believe we have done any good," said Pitts one day after some old dowager had foiled their utterance of an explanation. "We are not great and successful diplomatists," he added with regret. "You are brave to walk up to the guns in that bold way, but when I see a woman, like a three-masted, square-rigged ship, coming along, I'm ready to fly to the nearest cellar."

Adela Percy had summoned pride of life and all its attendant

swains to her aid. She had assured Nancy that she would never see Mr. Bridlington—"never," asseverated she, and Nancy, who knew little about men and less about women, who was as attractive herself as a stone wall and about as fascinating, believed what Adela said. She could not guess that Adela wanted what she said she didn't want. Nancy did not know that Adela listened and waited for his step on the gravel with a sickening sense that he would never, never come to her. Adela's heart was sore for one word from the man whom she loved. The hurricane had broken even as Mrs. Norton had predicted, and it was devastating as hurricanes usually are.

"Don't you believe he only thinks he *ought* to see me?" asked Adela.

Nancy thought so and said so.

"I am too proud to listen," announced Mrs. Percy with her head up. "I am not done for. The *Family Sentinel* will take all I can do; you and I can live together. I'll come to London."

"And forget all about these wretched men." Nancy felt so wise. "You will be so happy when once you get away from here."

One night Adela heard stealthy steps outside the house. She got out of bed and opened the little window gently and noiselessly. It was after twelve. It was Mr. Bridlington. She watched him for a long time, and was it her imagination, or did he murmur "Adela" as he turned away?

"Mr. Bridlington wanted to marry you once," said Nancy.

"Not now. How could he, with his position in the county? They all would cut me. Can't you hear them all saying: 'Poor man, he was caught by a woman at his lodge! Ah, awful infatuation! he was obliged to marry her.' I can see Lady Esther McAdam nodding her old head over my sins. No woman who has any wisdom ruins a man's future; it is too deep a wrong to try and fill up with love! Love counts for nothing these days; no one marries for it, no one cares about it. Thank Heaven, lots of them read about it, or my trade would be done for!"

"Will you see Mr. Bridlington?"

"No, I won't." She would have said yes if he had come and asked her, but he did not do that, he merely sent Mr. Pitts. Nancy interviewed him.

IX.

If ever a man were distracted that man was Harold Bridlington. He felt like an active dog whom everyone tells to lie down. "In the multitude of counsellors there is strength," said a wise man, but to Harold that maxim appeared the height of absurdity and folly. Between the advice and wisdom purveyed by Nancy, not to mention her ill-concealed disapproval of his conduct, the wise admonitions of Mr.

Pitts, who was sensible, if despairing, Harold would willingly have seen his advisers in the train or, better still, on board a ship without a return ticket. Nancy kept Adela out of his way; he knew Nancy influenced her against him. It was hard, for the only way out of it all was to have a long explanation with Adela. She was the only one who had anything to forgive; he knew he had been very indiscreet; she was the only one to whom he owed anything, and those idiots assumed airs of horror and surprise when he doggedly insisted on seeing her.

After wasting his breath and his afternoons in arguing with them he maintained a stolid and morose silence, but he bided his time.

Suddenly Adela resumed her duties. She took the post-bag up to the Big House. Nancy had been doing it for her. Afternoon after afternoon passed, and she made her way up there unmolested. Harold was quite aware of her occupation; he was lying low. "Gimme time," said Br'er Rabbit. Harold Bridlington wanted the same thing.

One afternoon a drizzling rain was falling; there was snow on the ground and the rain changed to sleet; it was very cold.

Adela started to go to the house with the post. She left Nancy asleep by the sitting-room fire. At first she had been afraid of meeting some of the servants, who might have been rude to her, but the phlegmatic calm of the man who opened the door reassured her.

Harold was wandering along the thick trees which were between the lodge and the house. He saw Adela coming from his proud eminence, a rock behind a screening bush. About two hundred yards behind her, following her, was a man. Who was he? The stranger slipped on a piece of ice, made even more slippery by the half-rain, half-snow, and he swore. The voice was exactly like Frank Savage's. Harold caught up to Adela. She started as she felt him grip her arm.

"Don't make a noise! Savage is following you. Turn to your left." He told Mr. Pitts that it was the most awful moment of his life; he feared she might tell him to go, to leave her at once; all the future hung on what she might say as he seized her arm. She obeyed him. He led her through the trees and they went back, away from the house. Savage passed them quite close; he was going faster, was afraid of missing his quarry. "Come on here." Harold held her hand. It was a passive hand; he could feel little electric thrills up and down his own arm. He took her over to a big rock which made a shelter from the wind and the rain.

"He must not find me here with you," she cried. "He will say—what will he not say?"

"Keep quiet and he shall not find you," said Harold.

"Nor you?"

"Nor me. I want to talk to you. Nancy says you hate me. She

says you won't see me. It is only fair to give me a chance; even a man tried for murder has someone to defend him. May I defend myself?"

"Yes."

"Well, first thing, I love you—love you—love you!" He set his teeth hard as he spoke. "I want to marry you. I know, Miss Furnival told me, you blame me for all this; I would give all I possess to have prevented it; I never dreamed the Rector could have been so horrible. The rest you know. I mean you know that Savage told he had met you when he heard Lady Esther laughing about the pretty Mrs. Percy."

"He said you told."

"Of course, he would say that. You did not believe him?"

"Where is he now? Has he gone up to the house?"

"He won't follow you here;" but a crashing of boughs and a heavy footfall proclaimed that Mr. Savage had struck a track of some sort. Adela involuntarily drew nearer Harold.

"Don't let him find me—don't let him find me!" besought she.

He took her hand; she was trembling, she did not withdraw it. He put one arm round her. He watched Savage strike a match, which the wind kindly blew out. "Keep still," he said. He could hear the snorting and puffing of the man among the bushes, and then—welcome sound!—the voice of Hatch, the head gamekeeper.

"Now, then, what are you doing here?" said Hatch.

"I'm Mr. Savage, from Lady Esther MacAdam's."

"Well, then, sir, I'll show you the way home." Hatch was polite but firm.

"We are safe,"—he let his arm fall away from her,—"*now* give me an answer."

"It was true," she said. "I must explain about Mr. Savage. I've been a fool, and I did say that I was coming over to get married. I had no money and no home, so I took all I possessed and——"

"I have heard all about that from Miss Furnival. I want your future; I want you to spend it with me; I don't want your past annotated by yourself."

"I am horrid. You must not think I am better or nicer than I am. I can't marry you."

"Why not? In a month I sail for Canada. I want to look after the ranch. My brother is there and he is anxious to get over here. Will you come with me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't have you sacrifice yourself for my sake. I—why do you make me say these things? I have no reputation, I—oh, can't

you see you must not think of marrying me; it would not be right. Think of the county people!"

"What have they got to do with it?"

"You have to live here. It is your home."

"Not at all. This is my brother's place; I have just been looking after it for him. It was not left to me, I prefer the ranch, so—the old man knew it—my share was money. I can give you bread and butter, but not a place and a mansion like the Big House. A home on the ranch and love—is all I have to offer you; if you are still what you said you were, in search of a fortune, you will refuse them, and if——"

"Why didn't you tell me before? I—that alters everything."

"I kept that. Pitts knew. Will you come?"

"I'll come, gladly."

"I am not satisfied. Are you coming because you want to show me you were not looking for——"

"Stop! I love you! that is what would take me out to the ranch."

"You need not worry about these people. Out there we don't imagine evil, as they do."

"Come and tell Nancy."

"I hate Nancy, but I'll come. In exactly four weeks from to-day you start with me in the Amsterdam for Boston. You can choose the day you will marry me. I leave it to you, but I think the Saturday before the ship sails would suit me best."

"Then Sunday would be such a long day with you on my hands to amuse," said the old Adela with a little laugh. It did him good to hear her.

"That's a happy laugh," said Harold.

"Come on, I want my tea. Hurry!"

Hand-in-hand they tore back to the lodge. Mr. Pitts and Nancy were having a solemn consultation when they opened the door.

"You are both coming to dine with us to-night," said Bridlington.

"No, we're not coming," answered Adela. "I have nothing to wear but a striped cotton rag. What would your servants say?"

"Well, then, I intend to come here immediately after my dinner. Pitts, you can take Miss Nancy up to play the banjo for you. I don't care what the servants say. My brother won't mind when he comes into his own, and by that time, Adela, you and I will be beyond his skyline!"

"You've buried the hatchet?" asked Nancy.

"Yes," said Harold, while Mr. Pitts performed wild dances round them, "and we dug up a wedding-ring while we were conducting the funeral."

AVOWALS

BEING THE FOURTH OF A NEW SERIES OF
"CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN"

By George Moore

Author of "The Untilled Field," "Evelyn Innes," etc.



I N reading "War and Peace" we are surprised at the skill with which Tolstoy pleads that Napoleon was a mere creature of circumstance, and that the enterprises of which he was the central figure were merely forces of nature which alternately drove men eastward and westward. Tolstoy pleads his case with the same skill as De Quincey pleaded that Judas Iscariot was a traitor only in the technical sense of the word, for Judas, according to De Quincey, believed more than any other disciple in Christ's power, and led the Roman soldiers into the Garden of Gethsemane so that Christ should delay no longer, but declare Himself King of Judea. But De Quincey's essay was only intended as an exhibition of his dialectical skill, whereas Tolstoy would not have us doubt the sincerity of his belief that Napoleon was without military genius, and that his battles would have been won without his strategy. He would persuade us that the Russian General who refused to follow up Napoleon's retreat was a man of extraordinary genius, for it was part of Tolstoy's ethical scheme to set this General's fatalism against Napoleon's individualism; and his dilatoriness is extolled as a virtue, and he is admired as one of the wise fools who, knowing that the hand of Providence is everywhere, are content to allow Providence to work for them—a more difficult case than De Quincey had to plead, for little is known about Judas; but Napoleon lived in a blaze of notoriety, and unless we assume that life yields no evidence whatever, we must believe in his genius.

Several years passed, and during these years Tolstoy wrote "Anna Karenina." Like "War and Peace," it is full of ball-rooms, barrack-rooms, race-courses, farmyards, and hayfields, and Tolstoy seems as desirous as ever of describing the outward aspect of life. Here we might linger to debate whether the tale-teller should separate a story from circumstance, or should describe circumstance, letting the story find its way out as best it can. We will leave this interesting and instructive discussion to another aesthetician; for our present purpose

is not to consider Tolstoy as a tale-teller—our curiosity is directed towards the man, and we are going to seek the man in the book; and in this book, as in the first book, we discover that Tolstoy had an aim other than to reveal to us human instincts; and this aim appears to be to prove that if a woman leave her husband and live with another man, even though she obtain a divorce and marry again, her moral character loosens and disintegrates; that a woman's character is dependent upon the marriage tie; that if that tie be broken, she will find herself sooner or later unable to bear the strain of life, and will throw herself under a passing train. We must assume that this is Tolstoy's intention, for he is careful not to endow Anna with any characteristics which would prevent her from living happily with her lover. Anna is presented to us as a woman highly endowed; she has beauty and courage; there is nothing in her character to prevent her from living happily with her lover. In real life she would have lived happily, and Tolstoy knows it. Everyone's list of acquaintances furnishes instances of women who, though they failed to live happily with one husband, succeeded in living happily with another; his instinct must have revealed to him this primary truth. But he put aside all his experience, and closed his eyes to his instincts, and wrote a long book with a view to promulgating an eccentric doctrine derived from the reading of texts. He always suffered from the disease of doctrine, in his earliest writings, and the disease developed astonishingly between writing "*Anna Karenina*" and the "*Kreutzer Sonata*." If Tolstoy had not been a great reader he would have been a great writer. Years were spent in long, close, comparative examination of the different texts of the gospels, and the result of this examination was a number of books, books which revealed to us Tolstoy seeking the way of perfection.

✓ "My Confession" tells the story of a man miserable even to the point of hanging himself, though surrounded by every comfort, though watched over by a loving wife, though surrounded by loving children. And it may be doubted if anyone has confessed himself more truthfully, certainly no one has confessed himself so intensely, and the book is freer from doctrine than any of Tolstoy's novels; it is also free from the ugly externality which vexes and bewilders the reader in the novels.

✓ But soon after the production of this admirable book we find him suffering from another attack of doctrine, and this time the doctrine he promulgates is derived from the Fathers. The phrase, "Fornication is a dung-heap, marriage is barley, chastity is wheaten flour," occurs in St. Jerome, and the temper of mind that wrote this was attractive to Tolstoy, and he brooded and hatched a doctrine that might have scared St. Jerome. The monks are reputed to have weighed and de-

fined every sin; but I do not know if they have attempted to describe the exact pleasure a man may take in his wife's beauty; for want of sufficient literary skill their labors have remained hidden in obscure texts. But Tolstoy has literary skill in abundance, and his voice is shrill,—none shriller,—and never has even Tolstoy shrilled louder than in the "Kreutzer Sonata." The story is told in a railway carriage by a man who has murdered his wife, and the murderer attributes his misfortune to a well-fitting jersey.

This austere man is constantly discovering what everyone knows, and his discovery in the "Kreutzer Sonata" is that the pleasure we derive from evening parties is directly or indirectly a sexual pleasure, that the food and the wine and the music and the dancing have no other meaning. We feel moved to answer:

"But, my good Tolstoy, neither has the May day. You are the blasphemer, for you rave against life, and your extraordinary intelligence is, to parody one of your own phrases, but the folly of the wise."

Tolstoy's extraordinarily intense intelligence is the cause of Tolstoy's folly, and his intelligence is extraordinarily intense because it is extraordinarily narrow. Who could not have told him that in the second century Christianity was found to be incompatible with life, and that the Church was invented to enable the world to wag on very much as before? That the Church abolished the Mysteries of Ceres and permitted evening parties? But Tolstoy perceives that evening parties are not a great moral improvement on the Mysteries, and that the clerical answer, that women are not aware of the immodesty of their gowns, is but a subterfuge. Tolstoy sees all this very clearly, and the poor old man thinks he is going to remake humanity. And this reminds me of some ladies in Ireland who think they are going to revive the Gothic.

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Tolstoy's writings may be described as long-drawn-out paradoxes, each uglier than the last, until he reaches the ultimate ugliness—"Resurrection." Yet the incident that suggested this story was beautiful; we shall see how it became ugly in Tolstoy's hands. A judge who had tried a Finnish girl for stealing told Tolstoy how one of the jurymen—a man who had never shown any interest in ethical questions before—was so overcome by the thought that he and eleven other sinners should be called to condemn a thirteenth sinner that he obtained permission to visit the girl in prison in order that he might offer himself in marriage. The girl accepted gladly, seeing in a rich marriage only an endless gratification of her instincts. The man perceived in time that she did not understand the sacrifice he was making and withdrew. Some years after he married a girl of his own class and who shared his ideas, but with whom he did not succeed in living

happily. In Nature's tale there is beauty and truth—in Tolstoy's there is certainly no beauty and I think very little truth. It is no more than the ethical problem already treated in "Anna Karenina," that if a woman indulge in illicit love she will sink lower and lower until life becomes unbearable. In "Anna Karenina" the man and the woman are allowed some individuality, in "Resurrection" none at all; and in the person of the man the original story is shockingly violated, he becomes the original seducer just as in an ordinary melodrama; and to get an effect Tolstoy had to send the girl to Siberia, and as this could only be done by an accusation, the girl is accused of administering poison.

This book is Tolstoy's worst book, and it is perhaps the ugliest book ever written. It is without truth or beauty; it is written like a scientific treatise. The artist has grown so callous that he does not seem to have perceived that if the story were to be written at all it should be written without descriptions of externals, as he wrote "My Confession." He has grown so callous that he makes no attempt to adapt his style to his subject, and his description of externals in "Resurrection" is more aggressively external than in any of his other books. The story is littered with descriptions—the appearance of every juryman is described, and one pauses to wonder why he was at such pains to tell us that a certain woman's neck sweated, and to wonder why we are told that the legs of a fowl—a fowl that is killed for dinner ten minutes after—are black and feathery. Age has not softened the cold eye that saw so clearly at thirty. Tolstoy writes at seventy as he wrote at thirty. His mind is like a steel-blue lake reflecting only birchen trees, meagre pines, rocks, and morose, wind-driven clouds, shadow-shapen, conscience-stricken souls wringing their hands; and the shores of the lake are filled with the voices of these agonized souls questioning one another as to the meaning of life and art, and the cries of these spirits are so piercing that they disturb the happy spirits that dwell in the valley of pleasurable waters. "Rest, perturbed spirits of the ghostly lake," they cry. "Here the swimmer swims luxuriously amid implicated islands and overhanging boughs and drifting scents, rejoicing in the beauty of birds and flowers, convinced of the great pagan truths—that life is an end in itself, and that the object of art is to help us to live. Rest, perturbed spirits of the ghostly lake. Why should we leave our valley, where there is music, and nymphs dance under blossoming boughs? You are sure of nothing. The scrolls that you consult tell you nothing. But the flowers and trees and birds tell us all that we need to know. We see the life of the flower, animal life, and human life waxing and waning, and if we perceive no change in the granite rocks it is because the life of the rock lies outside our circle of life. In this valley all men know that the meaning of life is

life, and the artist doubts not that his mission is to reveal the precious essence, to persuade us to love life, and this whether he is painting an everlasting rock or an ephemeral flower."

In the book, "My Confession," Tolstoy tells a story of a traveller who was pursued by a bear and fell down a well in his flight. But the traveller was caught in the branches of a tree, and on looking down he perceived a dragon waiting for him to fall out of the branches, and on looking up he perceived the bear looking down over the edge. On examining the branches that supported him he noticed that they were breaking beneath his weight; but there was some honey on the leaves, and the traveller began licking the honey, unmindful of the bear and the dragon. The parable is an admirable one, but Tolstoy's understanding avails him nothing. He cannot look upon art as the honey that enables one set of men to forget the bear and the dragon; nor can he accept the Church, that enables another set of men to forget the beast above and the beast below. Instead of licking the honey from the leaves, he begins to argue about the relative value of art and morality, and this is how he arrives at the doctrine that a work of art cannot be truly appreciated unless we regard it as a morality, by first postulating that art is a means of communicating our ideas. Tolstoy is a sort of Jules Verne in morals; he takes an undeniable truth—that art is a means of communicating our ideas, proceeds step by step. One of the steps is that since art is a means of communicating our ideas, the best art is necessarily the art that inculcates the best ideas. And, taking this definition of art with them, the logician and ascetic, which are Tolstoy, go together through the museums and libraries measuring the masterpieces; and the conclusions he arrives at are as surprising as any of Jules Verne's—that Shakespeare and Beethoven and Wagner must be put aside as inferior writers, that the greatest works of literary genius are Dickens's "Christmas Carols." I confess to finding the examination of such nonsense somewhat tedious, but for the moment I am a critic, and it is my business. Now, whether art should inculcate moral truths as well as ideas of beauty is a favorite theme of discussion in the newspapers, and I have often wondered why the æstheticians, instead of limiting their argument to the statement that beauty is sufficient, never answer: "The fact that there is no moral standard is a sufficient reason why the artist should eschew morals. The commandment says, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but war is permitted," etc. Morals are like the veering wind, but beauty is a fixed star. The beauty of Homer's verses and Phidias's sculpture have never been called into question.

But art is anterior to morality and more sure, for while the beauty of Homer's verses and the sculpture of Phidias have never been

called into question, all moralities have been repudiated—even the words of Christ. If you were to say to Tolstoy, "You advocate morality, but which morality? There is no standard," he would say, "But there is a standard of good and evil, and that standard you find in the gospels." If you remind him that himself has discovered differences in the various texts, that himself is forced to make a selection from Christ's teachings, he will answer, "My interpretation of Christ's teaching is the true one, for it is in agreement with the voice of conscience, which you will hear speaking within you if you listen." In the first text the gospel says, "Be not angry with thy brother;" the later texts say, "Be not angry with thy brother without just cause." The whole of Tolstoy's doctrine of the non-resistance of evil depends on the omission of the words "without just cause," and when Mr. Stead asked him, "If you saw a drunken man kicking a child to death, should you use force to prevent him?" Tolstoy admitted that this was an exceptional case. A little while after he perceived that to admit an exception invalidated his doctrine, and he wrote to Mr. Stead saying that he was wrong, that not even in the case of a drunkard kicking a child to death should you resist evil. But every man's instinctive sense is opposed to this doctrine, and only for selfish reasons would a man withhold his hands from the drunkard.

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A naked mountain lake reflecting a few birchen trees and morose, wind-driven clouds is, I think, a true picture of Tolstoy's mind, a mind from which all beautiful and sensuous images have been banished. His mind has become like a mountain waste where nothing flourishes except theory,—theories as harsh as the pines and birches that grow in the waste,—an awful place, haunted by many spirits, and if he were asked the name of the spirits he would answer, "Their name is Legion." Our concern is with the principal demon, that of theory. Only He could have forced Tolstoy to represent Napoleon as a nonentity, whose personality counted for nothing in his campaigns; only He could have forced him to write a book to prove that if a woman leave her husband she will end by committing suicide; only He could have induced Tolstoy to argue that a man should not take pleasure in his wife's beauty; only He could have driven the author of "War and Peace" over the abyss that Dickens's "Christmas Carols" are the greatest literature. Such inhuman beliefs as these, beliefs that no man ever held, Tolstoy asks us to accept as his faith, and not only is he anxious to convince us that he believes, but he would have us believe that we should take no pleasure in our wives, and should, like him, believe Dickens's "Christmas Carols" to be the greatest literature. He is moved by a feverish desire of what he calls truth, and every two or three years we become aware of a gaunt figure suddenly gesticulating from the Steppes. And so it is the writer who desires the truth more

than any other, and who seeks it more anxiously, should have written so much untruth, and should have practised so little of what he preached, for Tolstoy is as untruthful in his life as he is in his works. He has said that a man should take no pleasure in his wife's beauty, but his own marriage was a love marriage and he is the father of many children. He has said that a man, even if he have stripped himself of everything except one blanket, should share it with a leper if the leper ask him for it, and he is the owner of large properties. The story runs that he once intended to divide his property among his peasants, but that his wife intervened. We would have preferred Tolstoy to say, with Tartuffe, "I preach the truth, but cannot follow it," for when we hear that he lives in a hut communicating by folding-doors with his wife's apartment we begin to think that this great man is in many ways a great goose. We begin to compare him, and to his disadvantage, with the mad King of Bavaria, without whose folly Wagner's genius would have come to naught during his lifetime.

◆

The composition of "The Ring" is not more marvellous than that of "War and Peace." But "The Ring" is more beautiful. If Wagner had painted, he would have painted like Veronese or Tintoretto, but if Tolstoy had painted, he would have painted like Kaulbach; or perhaps he would have preferred a pencil to a brush, a chalk pencil wherewith he would have scratched cartoons as moral as Kaulbach and as realistic as Raphaelli, without quality, the beautiful surface that great painters always have, a surface reminding us more of cream than oil-cloth; to explain myself I have only to compare Tolstoy's writings to Sir John Millais's later pictures; the intention of both seem to have been to transfer unfiltered nature on to paper and canvas. The presence or absence of quality is detected at once in painting and music, not so quickly in a book; it is long after reading a book that we find out if it had quality or hadn't. Our memories of Turgenieff and Pater are as delicate and illusive as moon-lit distances. But of "War and Peace" we remember nothing; it is interesting and captivating as life. As Mr. Howells put it, "It is not like life, it is life," and like life it is accessible to all—the cookmaid, the artist, and the philosopher read "War and Peace" with the same interest. "War and Peace" is a delightful winter companion, an admirable winter amusement for the leisured classes, and to have provided a winter amusement for the leisured classes is a curious fate for one who has set out to redeem the world from the evil of leisure. But Tolstoy's fate is not unlike the fate of his own characters, for every character in "War and Peace" went forth determined to do something, and they all did something, but no one did what he set out to do. We should beware of what we write in a book, for what we write will happen to us.

THE COAT AT THE FURRIER'S

A STORY IN LETTERS BY LUDWIG FULDA

Translated by Mrs. A. L. Wister



PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO DOCTOR GUSTAV STRAUCH.

BERLIN, November 20.

MY DEAR GUSTAV: I have something to tell you to-day which will certainly surprise you extremely. I have parted from my wife, or, to speak more correctly, we have parted from each other. By common agreement it is a perfectly friendly separation. My wife has gone to her family at Freiburg and will probably make it her permanent home. I remain for the time in our old house; perhaps I may look for a smaller one in the spring, perhaps not. I could hardly find anywhere else such a quiet study as this of mine, and the thought of my large library makes me dread the idea of moving.

Of course, you will want to know what has happened. Nothing, I assure you. The world will naturally invent all sorts of possible and impossible reasons why two people, who married for love, and have for eleven years lived together apparently happily, should part thus. Yes, this world, that thinks itself so wise, and that is in reality so idiotic, will doubtless suppose that there is a mystery here, and will find its solution in some one of the coarse suppositions which it has on hand ready for any emergency, not dreaming that life, with its inexhaustible possibilities, never repeats itself, and that one and the same combination of circumstances may wear various aspects, according to the character of those concerned. I need not say all this to you, my dear Gustav. You will easily understand how two delicately organized beings can no longer endure the outward semblance of marriage after they have, by a thousand fruitless efforts, convinced themselves of the impossibility of any agreement upon questions of the first importance.

My wife and I are by nature thoroughly antagonistic. There is an impassable abyss between her view of life and its duties and mine. In the early years of our marriage I hoped to be able to guide her, and gradually to bring her nearer to me; she seemed so impressionable, so docile, she took such an eager interest in my work, my plans, and

she was so ready to be taught by me. But after our boy's death a great change came over her. Grief at his loss, from which neither of us can ever entirely recover, matured her, and made her much more independent. A tendency, never displayed before, to brood, to analyze, took the upper hand in her mind, and lent intense persistence to views and ideas, partly inborn, partly acquired, which my influence had hitherto weakened, but never uprooted. She enveloped herself in a net of mystic ideas, of fantastically sentimental speculation, and insistently, even obstinately, demanded acknowledgment and respect for her point of view, rejecting passionately my calm, scientific opinions. She lost all interest in the studies of my profession, regarding my labors with unexpressed but evident dislike, as though they were but troops from a hostile camp.

At last, in the entire range of nature and of human experience there was scarcely a subject upon which we agreed. We never, indeed, absolutely quarrelled, but the more we tried to avoid doing so the more profound was our disagreement. We were distinctly conscious of merely being together, without any real union. This consciousness increased; it distressed, it finally tortured us, thrusting all other sensations into the background. Had our previous love for each other been less, we might have borne with each other more easily, and could, perhaps, have endured our strained relations for years longer. But our conception of the marriage tie is too exalted, our belief in our dignity as human beings too real, to admit of any frivolous intrusion upon such sacred ground. And so, about a week ago, the decisive word was spoken, as naturally, as much as a matter of course, as it is for an overripe fruit to drop from the bough. I hardly know whether she or I spoke first. A common desire for freedom took possession of each at the same time, and the fact that in the course of many years this was the first important subject which we could discuss harmoniously lent an air of beneficent reconciliation, which had long been painfully lacking with us, to what was otherwise a most distasteful matter.

Our separation accordingly took place yesterday after a most dignified fashion. There was not a word of accusation, not a discord. Each felt the necessity, and also the importance, of the step we were taking. Remembering the early period of our marriage, and all the years passed together since, we could hardly refrain from some expression of tenderness. And I confess to you that my wife never inspired me with more genuine respect than when, at such a moment, all pettiness seemed to have fallen away from her, and the original greatness of her nature was clearly manifest. It was her bearing—what she said, and what she did not say—that deprived the entire scene of any approach to the commonplace, investing it with the solemnity of a consecration. Deeply moved, with difficulty restraining our tears, we shook hands in

token of farewell. And thus we can, at least, look back upon the dissolution of our marriage with unalloyed satisfaction.

All business arrangements had, with her consent, been made beforehand through a lawyer. For there is to be no correspondence between us: it would but open old wounds and reveal fresh antagonism, robbing us of the strength necessary to meet the requirements of our divided lives.

We must begin all over again, both she and I. To do this there must be mental as well as material freedom from the past.

I already breathe more easily. The Rubicon is crossed. I think you may congratulate me.

PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO DOCTOR GUSTAV STRAUCH.

BERLIN, December 12.

MY DEAR GUSTAV: Forgive me for delaying until to-day the acknowledgment of your reply to my last letter—a reply full of delicate comprehension, of cordial sympathy. I have not been in a condition to write before; even now it costs me an effort. You give me your unqualified approval of a step which you deem the greatest possible aid to my comfort and to my mental development, but you hardly take into consideration what it means—this separation from a being with whom one has lived day and night for eleven years. I myself have come only gradually during these last miserable weeks to a full consciousness of its significance. Habit is a tremendous force, especially for men who, like yourself and myself, dwell in a world of the intellect, and know that it must rest upon a solid material foundation. For how can we maintain our outlook from the roof of our lofty tower if we are uncertain as to its base? Of course, such considerations vanish in view of the weighty reasons which determined my wife and myself to live apart. I am still firmly convinced that such a course is for the interest of each. But in this strange world of ours no calculation can be so close as not to leave a remainder.

There is always something disagreeable, confusing, in a transition state; in my case it has been positive torture. From morning until night I am occupied with petty matters of which I never dreamed in my bachelor days—matters which I am ashamed to mention to you, they are so ridiculously insignificant, and yet to a most disproportionate degree they deprive me of time, thought, and serenity; and I really cannot tell by what method to rid myself of these annoyances, of which my wife's presence relieved me. The servants! Now that the "cat's away" they think they can do as they please. And you can have no idea of the myriad of annoyances besides that daily beset my path. For example, we have had freezing weather for a couple of days, and I need my fur coat. I cannot find it. With the chamber-

maid's help I turned the entire house inside out, when it suddenly occurred to the girl that her mistress had sent it for safe-keeping to the furrier's. But to what furrier? No one knows, and consequently I have been to a dozen in vain.

If only I had not agreed with my wife that we must not write to each other! Then I could simply have asked her. Yet it is better as it is. No admixture of sordid care should sound a discordant note in the harmony of our farewell; no farce should follow a solemn drama. She might think that I repent, that I can less easily do without her than can she without me, that I seize the first pretext to renew our former relations. Never!

To-day it is six degrees below freezing.

PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO FRAU EMMA WIEGAND.

BERLIN, December 14.

DEAR EMMA: It will astonish you to receive a communication from me in spite of our common agreement. Do not be afraid that I mean to open a correspondence with you. Our relations with each other have been ended in the most dignified manner, and there will assuredly be no attempt on my part to open a door so closed. There is a very small matter in question which you alone can settle. What is the name of the furrier to whom you sent my fur coat for safe-keeping last spring? Awaiting a speedy reply, I thank you in advance.

MAX.

FRAU EMMA WIEGAND TO PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND.

FREIBURG, December 15.

DEAR MAX: The furrier's name is Palaschki, and he lives in Chambers Street. I cannot understand Lina's forgetfulness. She carried the coat to him herself.

EMMA.

PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO FRAU EMMA WIEGAND.

BERLIN, December 17.

DEAR EMMA: Once more, but for the last time, I must trouble you. Herr Palaschki declares that he cannot give up the coat without possession of the receipt which he gave for it. He adheres strictly to this rule, since several disagreeable complications have arisen from neglect of it. I have spent this entire morning in a vain search for the receipt, and, of course, Lina knows nothing about it. I reproached her for this in the gentlest manner, and she instantly became insolent. She leaves the house to-morrow. I prefer to pay her her wages in advance and to add Christmas money rather than have such a worthless, impertinent woman beneath my roof.

The Coat at the Furrier's

Be so good, then, as to tell me where the receipt is. I have already taken a violent cold for lack of the coat. Hoping that you are well, and that you are happy with your family,

MAX.

FRAU EMMA WIEGAND TO PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND.

FREIBURG, December 19.

DEAR MAX: The receipt is either in the little bureau in the dressing-room, the third or fourth drawer from the top, or in the right- or left-hand drawer of my writing-desk. I could find it in a minute if I were there.

Lina has grave faults, I know, but she really is one of the best of her class, and now, just before Christmas, you will find it hard to replace her. I doubt your finding anyone better. You might have patience with her for at least a few weeks longer. But that is now no affair of mine.

I trust you have recovered from your cold. I am very well.

EMMA.

PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO FRAU EMMA WIEGAND.

BERLIN, December 21.

DEAR EMMA: The receipt is not there—neither in the bureau nor the writing-desk. Perhaps it dropped out and was thrown away in the confusion of your packing. That is the only explanation I can think of.

To-morrow or the day after I will go once more to Herr Palaschki and try to coax my property from him by all sorts of promises of indemnity in case of a mistake. To-day I must stay in the house, for, in addition to my cold, I now have a severe nervous attack.

Yesterday I had a most annoying scene with the cook.

I accidentally discovered that since your departure she has been steadily pilfering articles of food. When I very mildly accused her of so doing, she turned the tables upon me, and declared in the most brutal and vulgar way that I understood nothing of housekeeping, and that she had remained here for extremely low wages solely out of pity for you, and that she should leave the house upon the spot. I replied gently, but firmly, that it was her duty to remain in her place until the end of her month. She then began to bawl and to gesticulate, and even had the insolence to maintain that you had found it impossible to live with me. At this I lost my self-control, I was furious, and—how I came to do so I cannot tell—but I must have used the expression "low creature." Unfortunately, I have no experience of such hags.

When I rang for supper a couple of hours afterwards I discovered that she had departed, "bag and baggage," leaving on the kitchen table for me a curiously spelled billet-doux wherein she threatened if I mo-

lest her at all, and did not give her a good written "character," to have me up before a magistrate for calling her a "low creature."

Now I am without servants. The wife of the concierge for an exorbitant fee blacks my shoes and brings me wretched meals from the restaurant, and, as you justly remark, there is no hope of my engaging a decent servant before Christmas or New Year. I have already sent to a dozen employment bureaus, and I shall go to them myself as soon as my health will permit.

This has grown to be a long letter, dear Emma. Out of the fullness of the heart the pen scribbles on.

Moreover, I have a strong suspicion that that worthless cook has carried off my gold sleeve-buttons, the ones my uncle left me in his will; of course, I have no proof of this; or perhaps you may have some idea of where they are. If you have, I should be grateful if you would drop me a line.

Farewell, dear Emma, and pray be more comfortable than I am.

MAX.

FRAU EMMA WIEGAND TO PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND.

FREIBURG, December 23.

DEAR MAX: I read with sincere sympathy your account of the petty annoyances to which you have been subjected. The cook has often been as impudent to me as she was to you, but I quietly ignored it because she was an excellent cook. It is only poor cooks who treat us with deference. With their class you can always estimate the excellence of their cooking by the insolence of their behavior.

Now, at least, you see what I had to contend with, year out, year in, and you can understand that even in this domain problems arise which no science of natural philosophy enables one to solve.

I am not in a position at this distance to advise you. As you so perfectly expressed it in your first letter, I too would fain, after our dignified separation, hold myself aloof from all sordid considerations.

As for the receipt and the sleeve-buttons, I wager that I could find them in five minutes. You surely remember how often you rummaged long in vain for some lost article, which I found as soon as I began to look for it. Men can, and do, from time to time, discover some grand truth, but never an old button.

Since we are corresponding,—by your desire,—I too have a small request to make. I forgot to ask you before my departure to give back to me the letters you wrote me while we were engaged, and which I asked you to keep for me in your iron safe. They belong to me, and I should like to have them in my possession as memorials of a happy time. Be kind enough to send them to me.

I wish you a merry Christmas.

EMMA.

PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO FRAU EMMA WIEGAND.

BERLIN, December 25.

MY DEAR EMMA: Your wish with regard to a merry Christmas has not been fulfilled. Never in all my life have I passed so forlorn and cheerless a Christmas Eve.

You can understand the reluctance I felt to accepting the invitations of our friends—to being a mere spectator of family felicity. So I remained at home—if where I am can be called a home. I was quite alone in the house, for, in spite of my desperate exertions, not a servant is to be had before the first of January, and yesterday there was not even a substitute. The wife of the concierge had put my meagre supper upon my table early in the afternoon, that she might devote herself to her children for the rest of the day with no thought of me. A flickering petroleum lamp took the place of the Christmas-tree which you have arranged so charmingly and tastefully every year, and there were none of those pleasant little surprises by which you forestalled my wishes almost before I was conscious of them myself. On the table there was only my old fur coat, which the furrier, moved thereto either by my continued entreaties or by the influence of the holy-tide, had sent home in the forenoon.

The room was bitter cold, for the fire had gone out and all my science had failed to show me how to rekindle it. I put on my fur coat, sat down beside the lamp, and read the letters written to you before our marriage; I had taken them from the safe to send to you to-day.

I cannot describe to you, dear Emma, the impression they produced upon me. I cried like a child, not only because of the sad ending of a union that promised so much, but also over the change that has been wrought in me. The letters contain much that is crude, much that does not now accord with my views, but what a fine, fresh, warm-hearted fellow I was then! How I loved you! How happy I was! And how frankly and innocently I revelled in my happiness! Yes, that was the gist of it all—that youthful freedom from all foreboding, that mental vitality, the wealth of which fairly overran everything about it like a vine in spring. Hitherto I have thought that you have been the only one slowly to change; now I know that I am no longer the same; and God knows, when I compare that Max with this one, there is no hesitation as to which to prefer.

During the sleepless night which followed I have tried hard to transform myself to the former Max, and grave doubts have arisen in my mind as to whether the difference in our views and opinions were really as great as we thought it—whether there were not much of neutral ground where we might have made, and continued to make, common cause.

Reflect, dear Emma, and see whether you are not conscious too of some such inward voice. What is done cannot be undone, but nothing could comfort me more in my present miserable condition than to have you admit this, for your departure has left a void in my home and in my life which I can never, never fill. Your most unhappy

MAX.

FRAU EMMA WIEGAND TO PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND.

FREIBURG, December 27.

DEAR MAX: While you asked me about receipts and buttons I was quite ready to reply to you; I must refuse to answer the questions you put to me in your last letter. For do you really believe, old pedant that you are, that I could have left your home, which was also mine, just because our views and sentiments did not accord? If you do, you are terribly mistaken. I left you because I saw more and more clearly that you no longer loved me. Yes, I had come to be a burden to you; you wanted to be rid of me—so much was plain. If when we bade each other good-by you had said one tender word, I should, perhaps, still have stayed. But you maintained your seat, as ever, upon your high horse of "views of life," from which, however, you have now had an ignominious tumble because you have no servants. Oh, I loved you faithfully, but you had no eyes to see it. I did not let the fire go out upon your hearth; it was not my fault if the home were not warm!

Who knows that you would ever have noticed the "void" left by my departure if you had not missed your fur coat? That was the reason for your opening a correspondence with me; it seems to me fitting that it should be closed, now that you have fortunately recovered the garment. I, at least, have nothing more to say. Farewell forever.

EMMA.

PROFESSOR MAX WIEGAND TO DOCTOR GUSTAV STRAUCH.

BERLIN, January 8.

DEAR GUSTAV: Again I have a surprising piece of news to communicate. My wife came back to me yesterday. She yielded to my fervent and urgent entreaties. I thought I could not live with her; I find I cannot live without her; and she tells me that she too was very unhappy while we were apart. But she would never have confessed as much to me then, for she is the stronger of the two. I cannot explain the miracle, but we love each other more truly than ever. We are having a second honeymoon. The important problems of existence have separated us; can it be that its trifles have reunited us? Or may it not be that in the pocket of an old fur coat a withered heart was discovered?

The structure of my View of Life is tottering to its fall, dear Gustav. I must rebuild it.

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

By Guy Wetmore Carryl

Author of "Zut, and Other Parisians"



FROM the square eastern window of the Holliston Hunt Club the eye strayed pleasantly out over swells and dips of land to where, two miles distant, lay the sea, a sheet of crinkling blue under the noonday sun. The country between, for the most part a succession of residences in the centre of scrupulously kept grounds and gardens, was broken here and there by groups of trees, among which the white trunks of silver birches stood conspicuously out. In summer but little of all this was visible through the elms and maples which immediately surrounded the club-house, but now, in the cold, flinty light of late December, every smallest detail was perceptible, as clearly and cleanly presented to the eye as the minutiae of a Meissonier interior. The landscape was a commingling of perfectly harmonizing drabs and browns, and against this background the big country-houses, with their colonial porticos or fawn-colored stucco, stood in prominent relief. Just now all these were occupied, for Christmas week at the Holliston Hunt Club had come to be an institution, and for these eight days the countryside stirred into feverish activity. House parties were everywhere, and for five miles around the club Holliston County was alive with girls in short skirts, men in riding togs, trim little cobs spanking along in front of Meadowbrook carts, and hysterical terriers of half a dozen breeds describing mad circles on the brown lawns. Inside the club-house there was a smell of holly, and box, and wood-smoke, and fur, and the leather of boots and puttee leggings, a gay chatter of voices, and a pleasant succession of glowing faces and bright, clear eyes. It was all very jolly and very smart, an uninterrupted crescendo of luncheons, and teas, and dinners, and dances, and the manifold delights of out-of-doors, until the New Year's ball: after which it was as if someone had taken the snuffers to Holliston County until well along in May.

Jimmy Barringer had arrived late the preceding evening, had slept the somewhat inadequate sleep of the feverishly expectant, had breakfasted with an impaired appetite, and, three minutes later, had received a facer at the hands of Beverly Winthrop, the walking bureau of information and social register of Holliston County.

"You've heard that the Kittredges are back?" inquired this gentleman in the course of much else that was immaterial.

"Yes," answered Jimmy, solicitously regarding his pet nail, "but I haven't seen them. I was in Cuba when they landed, and they came straight through from New York to open the house. Let's see—they must have been gone almost a year?"

"Just about," agreed Winthrop, narrowing his eyes. "It took them some time, but they caught it at last."

"Caught it—caught what?" demanded Jimmy, with a vague impression of whooping-cough or measles.

"Why, the title. Don't tell me you didn't know that was what they went over after! Why, man, they've been scrabbling round the fashionable resorts of Europe like squirrels in a wheel for a twelve-month, and casting the net in every crowd where they saw the gleam of a coronet. But the net was too weak to hold the big fish, and the little ones all slipped through. It took them some time to find something of medium size, but at last they landed it, and have brought it home in triumph. I met it there at luncheon yesterday, and Esther was looking as happy as if she were going to marry a real, live man, instead of Comte Henri de Mans de Chambour—and some other 'de's' which I don't seem to remember."

Winthrop paused to light a cigarette, and Jimmy stole a glance at him. He was taking his face remarkably well, was Jimmy.

"I hadn't heard of the engagement," he said.

"Oh, it's not actually announced," said Winthrop. "They are saving it for the New Year's ball, I imagine—but the evidence is all in and quite conclusive. You ought to see him, Jimmy!"

Jimmy let his desire for details be felt.

"All pink and pale yellow," announced Winthrop, plunging into sketchy description with the facility which was his forte, "pale yellow hair, pompadour; pale yellow mustache, just visible to the naked eye, and also heavenward pointing; pale yellow eyes; pink cheeks, and baby-pink conversation. And perfumed in layers, my dear, good sir,—like a pousse café,—lilac for the hair, orris for the face, violet for the mustache, and patchouli for the handkerchief! I'm sure I can't conceive what Esther Kittredge can see in such an article as that. Title, of course—yes! But no table of contents, my dear, good sir, none whatever!"

Jimmy formulated an elaborate yawn.

"I'm off for a gallop," he said, as if this were a disagreeable duty. "I may see de Whatshisname this afternoon. I suppose I ought to call on the Kittredges."

He left Mr. Beverly Winthrop with his legs spread far apart before the hall fire and his eyes still narrowed.

"‘They must have been gone nearly a year,’ eh?" said that omniscient individual to himself. "Just as if you hadn't been marking the days off on your calendar, my Jimmy! And ‘I suppose I ought to call on the Kittredges.’ Jimmy, Jimmy—what a piece of plate-glass it is, to be sure! Poor old Jimmy!"

Yet to the very end Jimmy had continued to take it remarkably well. He rode slowly down the drive in full view of the club windows, forcing his tidy little mare into a mincing gait by a simultaneous hint of curb and spur. It was not the sort of thing a disappointed and preoccupied man would be apt to think of, and Beverly Winthrop, watching him from the window, gave him due credit for artifice.

But, once out upon the unfrequented Mill Bridge road, the little mare was given her head in a fashion calculated to upset her entire system of equine logic, and for three miles and more was kept on a pounding run. As good fortune would have it, the day was comparatively soft, for James Barringer was in no mood to consider the feet of his mount.

There are ways and ways of expressing emotion. In another man than Jimmy that three-mile run would have been profanity, but it was a distinct improvement upon the latter in that it effectively restored his equanimity and his appetite. The Jimmy Barringer who strode up the Kittredges' driveway that afternoon at three was the same placid and twinkling-eyed Jimmy to whom Esther Kittredge had said good-by on the Cunard pier twelve months before.

Their meeting was the meeting of friends who have passed the stage when constant companionship is essential to complete understanding. For a year there had been no direct communication between them. It had been her wish, and was, as such, bound to be respected.

"I want time to think it over," she had said to Jimmy, "time to think what is best. I know you so well, and I see you so often, that I've lost my sense of perspective, so far as you are concerned." And so it had been.

Now he had his reward in the feeling that they had lost nothing by the experiment of this covenanted silence. If he were the same Jimmy, she was, assuredly, the same Esther—lithe, straight, and slender, with clear, keen, gray eyes, and a memorable smile, and a hand-grip firm and confident, like a man's. Behind her, Comte Henri de Crécy de Mans de Chambour twirled his small mustache uneasily as he watched them, awaiting the moment of introduction. When it came he executed a bow that was an heirloom in the de Chambour family, dating from the reign of the Sun King, and said:

"En-shanted, Meest' Barrinjaire."

Jimmy surveyed him quizzically. The type was new to him.

The Comte de Chambour looked as if he belonged, with a gilt bow

and arrows, on a valentine. He was very small and abnormally chubby, and had apparently been melted into his clothes; when he moved, it was in the manner of one practising a miniature waltz; and with his plump hands he gave his hair and apparel occasional surreptitious pats—the pats of a solicitous mother dispatching an only child to dancing-school. Had they met under any but these circumstances Jimmy would have regarded him with the large-minded tolerance of a mastiff for a toy terrier, but there was a significance to his presence here which made him formidable. He was the guest of the Kittredges, and the Kittredges—particularly the maternal Kittredge—did not have guests except for a purpose.

Suddenly Jimmy Barringer was conscious of a profound despondency. For four years he had fought against heavy odds, of which Mrs. Kittredge was first and foremost, for the one thing worth having in the world as he saw it. For four years he had contrived to hold his own. Other men had come into the race, for a time had seemed to outstrip him, but in the end had fallen behind. But these had been men approximately of like calibre with himself, whom he could understand, and deal with, and defeat in an unassuming but none the less effective fashion of his own. He had even managed to outmanœuvre Mrs. Kittredge, so long as she met him fairly on familiar ground and with familiar weapons.

This, however, was something new. The Comte de Chambour, all pink and pale yellow, with his cherubic countenance and his crafty little eyes, and, worst of all, his air of proprietorship in Esther's presence, was as incomprehensible as a being from another planet. Why was he there? What had he to gain? What might he not have gained already? Jimmy thought he knew the answer to all three questions, and when their eyes met his said unpleasantnesses to the eyes of the Comte de Chambour.

As was but natural, the conversation was limited to commonplace conventionalities. Esther gave an epitome of the family's travels, as fragmentary in relation to the whole as a short-hand transcription of solid print, while Jimmy devoured her with his eyes, and the Comte nodded complacently, throwing in an occasional remark with an infuriatingly intimate little "*ma chère*" on the end, which made his rival rage inwardly. What Jimmy found most ominous about this was the manner in which the trifling endearment passed as a matter-of-course. Little by little his fingers began to itch for the Frenchman's plump, clean-shaven throat!

An hour stumbled by in this fashion, and then the trio was reinforced by the entrance of Mrs. Kittredge with an open telegram in her hand and the expression of an expiring martyr on her face. She was a woman whose plans invariably went wrong, and who was wont to

fall upon the bosoms of her friends with the stereotyped lament, "Oh, my dear, what *do* you suppose has happened?" Also, she was objectionable to the Comte de Chambour for the reason that her speech was of the headlong, cross-country variety which leaves the luckless novice in English floundering in the first ditch.

"How are you, Jimmy?" she began, as if she had last seen him that morning, instead of a year before. "Oh Esther, my dear, what *do* you suppose has happened? Here's a despatch from Godfrey to say that he has gone down to a shooting-box on the Cape with some friends for Christmas. Is there anything as irresponsible as a sophomore? And who *can* we get to do Santa Claus for the children? Your father is much too stout for the costume, and, of course, we couldn't very well ask——"

Her eyes dwelt for a moment on the person of the Comte de Chambour.

"No, of course we couldn't," she continued at breakneck speed. "Oh, I'm *so* disappointed! The children would have been so surprised and excited—and now they'll just go on thinking there isn't any such thing—just when we might have convinced them—I call it *too* annoying of Godfrey—though, of course, he didn't know—I ought to have written him—and now it's too late to do anything—oh, *dear!*"

"But, mother," exclaimed Esther, metaphorically lassoing her volatile parent in full career, "here's Jimmy."

"Oh, *Jimmy!*" cried Mrs. Kittredge in the tone of a shipwrecked mariner hailing a sail.

The situation was familiar to Jimmy Barringer. So long as he could remember it had been his task to stop leaks in Mrs. Kittredge's foundering plans. Fifty per cent. of the dinners he had eaten at her table had been intended originally for some other man who had "given out at the last moment." Whenever shipwreck seemed inevitable, Mrs. Kittredge would hastily rig Jimmy as a jury-mast, and so sail triumphantly into port. He had a faint mental picture of the eligible whom she should pick out for Esther "giving out at the last moment" and he, James Barringer, being summoned from a rear pew to take the delinquent's place at the altar rail. But that was the dream which seemed too good to be true: the other duties forced upon him in his capacity of aide-de-camp to Mrs. Kittredge were the reality which was much too true to be good. In brief, in the eyes of Jimmy Barringer, Mrs. Kittredge was something to get used to, while Jimmy, in the eyes of Mrs. Kittredge, had always been something to be used. Thus far he had been mildly expectant of some intangible reward of virtue, having never experienced the virtue of tangible reward.

The present difficulty was soon explained. Mrs. Kittredge preempted Jimmy, and, on the library divan, poured forth the details of

her dilemma. Clement, aged ten, had been egregiously corrupted by the contaminating influences of boarding-school into the heresy that Santa Claus was a delusion and a snare, and had passed on this fruit of the Tree of Knowledge to Harold, aged seven. The emergency was instant. Had Mrs. Kittredge been the British government, she would have assembled the Channel Fleet. As it was, she had ordered the conventional habiliments of the time-honored saint from a costumer in town, and at a given moment, that very evening, Clement and Harold were to have been given a glimpse of Saint Nicholas in the act of putting the finishing touches to the Christmas-tree upon which her husband, Esther, the Comte, and herself had lavished the whole of the preceding evening. Godfrey, her eldest son, was to have impersonated Santa Claus, and the effect would have been to preserve the faith of the little boys for at least one more Christmas—but now!—and Mr. Kittredge was far too stout for the costume—and one couldn't very well ask the Comte—and, besides, he wouldn't understand—and if Jimmy could—and if Jimmy would—and if Jimmy should—

Mrs. Kittredge folded her hands and looked at him out of eyes that had once been inspiring—and still were, so far as Jimmy was concerned, because Esther had inherited them!

So it was that, three hours later, James Barringer, Esq., crept cautiously through the window which opened from the Kittredges' south piazza into the yellow drawing-room, and found himself in the deepening dusk in the presence of an incompletely decorated Christmas-tree, reared luxuriantly from floor to ceiling. He had dressed in the study, and was now attired in a fur cap, jacket, and knee-breeches, and boots spangled with imitation snow. His cheerful countenance was obscured by blue glasses and a flowing cotton beard. On his shoulders he bore a pack stuffed with excelsior and with a few delusive toys gaping from its mouth. He was consumedly uncomfortable, and had written himself down an ass, feeling, and not unreasonably, that this time Mrs. Kittredge had carried things to extremes. But, then, it was for Esther!—and oftentimes the extremes are as justifiable as the means, to an end.

Meanwhile Comte Henri de Crécy de Mans de Chambour had prepared to play his trump card. There was a certain yellow diamond, which had led the life of a tennis-ball, with the Comte on one side of the net and the pawnbrokers on the other. For the moment this was in the former's hands. Also, it had been mounted in a ring of sixteen-carat gold.

It was the delicate fancy of the Comte de Chambour to hang the box containing his ring upon the Christmas-tree, with a card bearing Miss Kittredge's name attached. He had already, with subtle tact, consulted Kittredge père and mère, and was under the delusion, born

of his national custom of procedure in affairs of the sort, that all thenceforward was to be smooth sailing. When it came to finishing the decoration of the tree that evening Miss Esther Kittredge would find the box, would be persuaded to open it, and——

"Oh, lala, lalala!" said the Comte de Chambour to himself, rubbing his fat hands, "but thou art a genius, my Henri—what?"

For the execution of this little stroke of diplomacy he selected a moment when the children were finishing their supper and the others assembled in the library over the evening papers. Unfortunately, he was unaware that another little comedy had already been prepared. It is known to be a matter of unconscionable difficulty to perform two comedies on the same stage at the same time.

In the gloom Jimmy took his stand near the tree to await the pre-arranged entrance of Esther and her little brothers. He had barely assumed this position when the door was softly opened, and Comte Henri de Crécy de Mans de Chambour stole noiselessly into the room. For a moment the little Frenchman hesitated, and then his chubby fingers touched an electric button, which flooded the room with light. The step from the sublime to the ridiculous had been irretrievably taken!

The impression produced upon the mind of the Comte by the grotesque apparition before him was as calamitous as it was immediate. He had never been conspicuous for physical prowess, even in a city and a society where this virtue is quoted at something below par, and the least formidable of marauders was calculated to have smitten him with a deathly qualm, while the figure which now confronted him was so strange, so ominous, so undreamt-of, that the sight of it turned his modicum of courage to the veriest pulp. To the enraptured eyes of James Barringer was thus presented the felicitous spectacle of a man he loathed in the grip of a vacuous and ludicrously gasping fear, and his heart began to crow like a bantam under his jacket of imitation fur.

It was not within the design of Fate that a tableau so effective should lack an audience, for now the door of the yellow drawing-room opened once more, and, as had been preconcerted, Esther made her appearance, with Harold clinging to her right hand and Clement to her left. These two young gentlemen, whose faith in an unstable tradition the original comedy had been designed to preserve, were instantly converted from their heresy, and in a vociferous commingling of rapture and alarm went bounding nimbly back towards the library in quest of reinforcements. From a distance their voices pierced the air, shrill with ecstasy, as they called heaven and earth, and, in particular, their parents, to witness the prodigy they had but now beheld.

"It's him! It's him! It's *h-h-h-him!*"

This outcry, more soul-satisfying on the ground of volume than on that of grammar, was the one thing needed to complete the demoraliza-

tion of the Comte de Chambour. With a single backward glance, which showed him Miss Kittredge, standing motionless, with her hands clasped at her cheek, he hurled himself, with all the force of desperation, upon the furry bosom of the saint.

But he was not the first to find that target an unyielding one. For example, there had been four successive right tackles on the Harvard 'Varsity who had proved to their entire satisfaction why a certain gentleman went by the name of "Stonewall" Barringer at Yale. The Comte rebounded, fell, rose, charged again with the same result, and yet again, and finally brought up, dangling, like a discarded suit of clothes, in Jimmy's good right hand.

"Don't be an idiot, Mounseer," observed his captor, with supreme calm and the most atrocious imaginable accent, and forthwith dropped him to the floor.

The Comte looked up at Miss Kittredge.

"Ah, you laff?" he said feebly. "Yees, eet ees a deevairtin' meestek. You laff veez me—aha!"

"Not *with—at*!" replied Miss Kittredge through her tears. And the Comte, who, despite appearances, was no fool, knew himself for lost.

Beverly Winthrop, the omniscient, had been, as usual, quite right. The engagement of Miss Esther Kittredge was announced, as he had prophesied it would be, at the New Year's ball of the Holliston Hunt Club. But, curiously enough, the name of Comte Henri de Crécy de Mans de Chambour did not figure in the bill. Indeed, at the moment that nobleman was pacing the deck of La Touraine with two tickets of widely different size and appearance and thirty-one dollars as his total assets. The sum in question represented the result of subtracting the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique's valuation of a second cabin passage to Le Havre from Mr. Israel Simonstein's opinion of a yellow diamond.



TWO NURSES

BY AGNES LEE

I N the soul's chamber, reft and bare,
When the soul may not weep,
Comes stealing in the Nurse, Despair,
And drugs it off to sleep.

But in some watch, ere night be dead,
Another takes her place;
At dawn, above the soul's dim bed,
Hope bends her beaming face.

A REDWOOD SANTA CLAUS

By Jerome Case Bull

L

LITTLE REDWOOD LEWIS was red-headed,—and he knew it. There was nothing in all the world he knew better, unless it were the redwoods back of Boulder. His hair was as red as the heart of the great redwood in which he was born, and that was, as he said, “as red as anything.” It was no usual thing to be red-headed, either; he knew that too. So far as he was aware he was the only person in the world so marked. Even as a very small boy he thought about it, and when his brothers and sisters came, with hair as black as a charred stump, the color of his own head seemed more than ever a matter of wonder to him. Very naturally, he laid it all to the tree. The black-headed babies had not been born in the hollow redwood, as he had, but in the leanto of shakes his father had built on at the back, so, of course, it was hardly to be expected that they would be as he. He was proud of his hair. Did it not make him one with the red squirrels, with the red-headed woodpecker that lived above him? And that, indeed, was something to be proud of. But as he grew up and each day carried the lunch down the mountain to his father in the shingle-mill at Boulder he regretted his hair, or, at least, the emphasis of its color. For was it not Boulder that named him Redwood the very first time he had gone there? And he never forgot it nor forgave the tone in which it was given. Nor did the name ever leave him for another. Indeed, for one endowed mentally and physically as was Reddy there could have been no other. Certainly it was his by every known right; and certain it was that for many years Boulder would countenance no other red-headed person in the neighborhood.

The Lewis cabin is on the wooded side of Ben Lomond Mountain near the crest, and, though just off the trail which winds down into Boulder, one would hardly discover it, for the cabin itself is the hollow base of a giant redwood-tree and redwoods tower all about it.

That any man should have taken up his abode in a hollow tree in the heart of the forest was, of course, not without reason. Once this reason was a matter of no light suspicion,—something of a mystery,—nor was the suspicion or the mystery cleared when, later, a slender, sweet-faced woman appeared at the tree door and children came. But that was years before, when the trail over the mountain was first put

through and Lewis's queer home revealed—when Reddy was a very small baby. The tide of timber-cutting never reached the heights of Ben Lomond, and after the brief period of question attendant upon its discovery Lewis's cabin sank into its original solitude. Except for the few who passed over the trail now and then and stopped to look in at the door or chanced to hear there some soft note of a lullaby its very existence was forgotten. In Lewis himself, steady, hard-working, soft-voiced, pleasant-mannered, was little of the question or mystery of the past, though past and mystery there undoubtedly were.

The tree dwelling had but one distinguishing architectural feature—the leanto of shakes tucked on at the back as a second room. Its chief claim to individuality was its inhabitants, its personnel, and in this respect it was strong. Nor was Lewis star among these inhabitants, even with the glamour of his past, nor was the sweet-faced woman who appeared just as mysteriously, and who in time, after the children came, ceased just as mysteriously to be a part of the population. It was the children themselves that the passer-by looked for, the children ever playing in the clearing about their strange home, their gay laughter ringing far down the mountain side. Even Boulder, in some interrupted buzz of its saw, now and again heard their merry shouts, smiled, and wondered. Children alone ran things, or, that is, one child, Reddy, ran them.

II.

On a particular morning in December Reddy was very busy in the cañon back of his cabin, chopping and trimming a redwood sucker. He was no novice at most kinds of work in the redwoods. Cutting chaparral or fighting fires, he had proven himself equally efficient. But the job in hand puzzled him. It was a job entirely new to him, a job in which, as the work progressed, he found himself, for the first time in his life, utterly dissatisfied with results. He was making a Christmas-tree. Only once had he ever seen a Christmas-tree. The year before, Minnie, the little daughter of Hennessee, the owner of the mill at Boulder, had taken him into her grand house—there were four whole rooms—and had shown him a wonderful sight. Of course, even in dreams he had no hope of making anything so superb as that. He had noted, though, that the tree itself was only a common redwood sucker, and she had told him that the tree was the first thing necessary. Thereupon he had promised himself that that part of Christmas, at least, he could and would have next year at his house.

But now that next year was here and Christmas to-morrow, and the tree chopped and stood up, he was not at all satisfied. There was something lacking. He could not tell just what it was, but he felt sure that just a common redwood wasn't, after all, exactly a Christmas-tree—anyway, not the Christmas-tree he had had in mind.

Such a soliloquy as this Lewis, the boy's father, overheard as he came up the cañon from his work at the mill and stopped to note the lad's labors.

"'Tain't any different from all the other suckers," Reddy broke out with emphasis. "What's the matter with it, Dad? I want it to be a Christmas-tree."

Dunc Lewis smiled; it was a sad, grave smile, but full of a sympathy that Reddy knew well, a love that meant as much as the father's reassuring words.

"It is a Christmas-tree, Reddy," he said. "It's a *fine* Christmas-tree. It's a regular *beaut*. Not another one on Ben Lomond like it; not one half so good; why, just stand back and take a good look at it." And Lewis drew the little fellow off to one side, gazing convincingly at the small sapling that, half stripped of its new green fir, stood propped up against a clump of manzanita.

The action and the words satisfied and Reddy beamed.

"I sha'n't put it up till the kids have gone to bed, though, Dad," he said. "They mustn't know. They'll be more surprised to see it all in the morning."

"What you got to put on it?"

"Oh, berries and things," the boy answered confidently. "I know where there's a lot of *red* ones the frost didn't get." Then, full of the thoughts of the Christmas he had been pondering about as he worked, he asked, "Do you suppose, Dad, there really is somebody who puts *real things* on Christmas-trees?"

Lewis did not answer.

"Minnie Hennessee said so when she showed me her tree last year. It was all full of silver and gold moss and red and green balls and presents. She said some man brought them. I don't just remember his name."

Lewis laughed to himself. "She was fooling you, Reddy," he said.

"No, she said *sure*."

"She was fooling you, though. I never heard of anybody doing things like that, not up here."

There was a moment of silence.

"Do you suppose he's a *real* man, Dad—if she *wasn't* fooling?"

"Perhaps, if she wasn't fooling."

"Gee! I'd like to see him once, wouldn't you, Dad? D'you suppose he comes up from Santa Cruz with the things?"

"Likely's not."

"On the stage?"

There was an emphasis on the "stage" that startled Lewis. He looked at the boy fixedly, a new light in his eyes.

"Did Minnie Hennessee say he came on the stage?" he asked slowly.

"She *said* he drove six tame bucks," came the answer.

There was a hesitancy in the boy's voice, as if he were afraid the statement might convince his father that Minnie Hennessee had indeed been fooling him. But Lewis did not notice it. He had forgotten the boy's existence. Wrapped in thought, he strode silently ahead. Even the children clamoring about him as he came into the clearing before their home failed to rouse him, and he ate his meal and departed in silence.

To Reddy this sudden abstraction of his father's was awful. Just now he wanted especially to talk to him about the tree, to settle its reality, to be assured again that it was all right, that it was a *real* Christmas-tree. But experience had taught him much, and silence was among the lessons.

There was a period of waiting until the time when the children should have gone to bed and he could bring his tree from the cañon below. Reddy thought of the berries that grew above the frosts and climbed the mountain for them. Great blotches of shining red, they stood out from the waxen green of their prickly leaves, tempting him higher and higher as better and better they seemed,—for only the best would do for his purpose,—until he found himself at the very top of Ben Lomond with the sun setting, golden, in the sea beyond.

Even with its troubling doubts the day had been one of great delight to him. What were troubling doubts compared to hopes such as his? He had believed his little friend's tale of the Christmas-tree and its presents for a whole year, and now he was not going to let a disappointment in the appearance of his own small redwood make him unhappy; no, nor his father's suggestion that Minnie was fooling him, either.

He got the evening meal for the children, whistling gayly, and bundled them off to their bunks in the leanto with the alacrity of a cross nurse that he might be off for his tree.

He had relied on his father's help in this task, but he waited in vain. Night came and settled over the mountain. Alone, he hurried away down the trail. With infinite labor he tugged his tree up the hill, back to the redwood room, and stood it firmly in the ground in the centre. He made sure that the children were all asleep, then lit a single candle and began operations. Here and there about his tree he tied bunches of the red berries he had gathered, here and there hung festoons of webby oak-moss. Over the top of Minnie Hennessee's tree had hovered a gold and white angel with gauzy wings. Reddy had trapped a brilliant road-runner days before for this very purpose. It was a good substitute; it was better; for his ornament was alive. Tied by one foot with a string fastened to a branch, the bird mounted

to the very top of the tree, and there, perched in solemn grandeur, eyed the work going on below.

At last it was finished, his part at least, ready for the team of bucks and—— Would they come? Would they come, as Minnie said they did, at midnight, loaded with presents, with everything he wanted, everything the kids wanted? Would they? Was she only fooling him, as his father had suggested? Was she? *Was she?* Surely *she* meant it. He *knew* she did—and his tree was ready.

He sat down and looked his work over and over; it was all right; "*He*" would do the rest. The candle was going out. The great heart of the giant tree opened up above him dark and empty; shadows of the little tree in the centre played over its sloping sides, bobbed and dodged in the flickering light, and disappeared in the blackness above as the candle sputtered and went out.

For a time he sat perfectly still in the darkness, wondering again about it all. Then, suddenly, he remembered his father. He was never away at night; something must have happened to keep him; he must go and see. He went to the opening in the tree and looked out. The clearing in front was flooded in moonlight, but on all sides lay the deep, silent black of great trees at night. Still, he was not afraid. And Boulder, to him, was no farther by night than by day.

III.

THE stage to Boulder was coming down the grade. Heaving and rocking on a grinding, scraping brake, with a clanging of harness chains ahead and no little profanity within, the old coach was making time, for it was Christmas Eve and Bill had dropped precious moments along the way in greetings. It was dark, so dark that Hennessee, the only passenger within, saw nothing anywhere save the half-imagined, half-shadowed trunks of giant redwoods filling the blackness about him and filing silently up the road as the stage rolled down.

At the foot of the grade the road turned out of the mountains and the darkness and crossed a level bit of country which lay clear and white in the moonlight. At the foot of the grade it was too that the stage came to a halt. With a final shriek of torture, the brake grappled the huge wheels, there was an extra jangling of chains, then a definite cessation of all motion and absolute stillness.

Hennessee gathered himself together and looked out—and so continued to look—exactly as the impulse of the moment directed. For the impulse of that especial moment was a business-like individual, very black and sinister from the mouth up, standing on the bank and ordering. Certain things about the man were unpleasantly assertive. His arm, held straight out before him, seemed of abnormal length

and pointed a ray of moonlight threateningly at Hennessee. The voice too, in word and tone, courted no parley, admitted of no delay—even advised dispatch in compliance with its owner's very politely suggested desires.

Bill, easily, slowly, as though a hold-up was an every-day affair, a very natural part of his business,—which, indeed, in years gone by it had been,—threw off the Wells Fargo box and the mail and awaited further orders.

"The parcels, if you please," said the voice.

A collection of small bundles tied together with a rope tumbled into the road.

It was to these parcels alone that the man on the bank gave his attention. He ordered the stage-driver to cut the rope and empty them into the road, then to read the addresses on the various packages. Of some half-dozen that bore the name of Hennessee he directed that a bundle should be made and thrown up to him on the bank. The Wells Fargo prize and the mail, to the utter confusion of the driver, he ordered back on the stage, and then very soberly, without the slightest suggestion of humor, he said, as he backed away into the thick chaparral and disappeared,—

"Charge these to Saint Nick."

It was over in a moment. The horses were still panting from their mad gallop down the grade. Bill shook himself and stared. Hennessee shook himself and swore roundly. Then he laughed aloud. Each looked at the other, at the empty sack in the road, at the bank of chaparral, at the road ahead in the moonlight, back at the dark hillside they had just descended, at each other again.

"That's the best I ever saw," said Hennessee. "Let's have a drink."

He offered his bottle to the driver, who, with a gurgle, crowned himself long and deep.

"What kind of stuff was that we got at Hickey's?" asked Hennessee, looking through his empty bottle at the moon.

But the driver did not answer that question.

"An old hand at the job," he said instead, motioning his head towards the chaparral.

"A good one, anyway," said Hennessee.

"Charge it to Saint Nick," chuckled the driver, half to himself.

"Cool, wasn't it?" said Hennessee. "Funny too, even if they were my things."

"Valuable?" asked the driver, concerned now with the loss.

"No-o, only some toys for the little ones to-morrow."

"Too bad," consoled Bill. "Have to tell them Santa Claus got held

up." And he chuckled again as he climbed up to his seat, gathered in his line, and released the brakes. "No doubt about *him*," he soliloquized, as the horses galloped away at the crack of the whip. "Doing Santa Claus himself to-night, I guess, and needed those particular things. Must have been a good one in his day. The nerve of him, though!"

IV.

BOULDER was on the eve of something, something rare, something good, which was equivalent to something almost preposterous at Boulder, something almost impossible, it seemed. Someone had made the startling announcement that it was Christmas Eve. The group of late loungers at the bar of the Cañon Hotel had received the news without a debate, even in wondering silence, which in itself was something, for the loungers at the Cañon debated all assertions. The very nature of the news may have been reason enough for this, but it is quite as probable that the source of information was the chief factor in its unquestioned acceptance. The source, on its face, was undeniably safe. A small boy had pushed his way into the group by the bar asking for "My Dad," and, finding gibes instead of news, had turned upon his tormentors with fierce denunciation in terms out of all proportion to his youth. He was half clad and was barefooted, but there was a business-like air about him which was fearless and bold, and Boulder knew him well. He met the jokes of the men without flinching and gave in return as good as was given. A roar of laughter greeted the boy's expressed views of the men's moral and mental worth, but a hush fell on the crowd when he shouted at them:

"Ching chong Chinamen! That's what youse all is. Youse ain't got sense enough to know it's Christmas Eve."

Christmas Eve! There at Boulder! And little Reddy the only one to remind them of it! They were dumb.

"Sure, ain't any of youse seen my Dad to-night?" Reddy asked again, and his voice was earnest and pleading. "Where's Bill?" he persisted. "Ain't the stage come yet?"

Alarm was creeping into his voice. Still the men said nothing. Their silence disarmed him. All his fearlessness of the moment before forsook him. After all, he was only a very little boy and afraid.

"Youse know something," he protested, "something about my Dad." He caught the hand of one of the men and looked up into his face. "What is it, Sim? What's happened?"

Sim was an especial friend of the boy and answered him honestly. "Your Dad ain't been here for a week, Reddy. Sure he ain't." And then, unable to stand before the boy's pleading look on the strength of his own word, Sim turned to his companions for support.

It was given seriously. "Honest, Reddy, he ain't," they said; "that's right, he ain't."

Though there was a certain satisfaction in their combined assurance of the absence of his father from Cañon society for at least a week, the fact helped Reddy little in his present search, and he turned away with tears welling in his eyes.

And now, faintly, from far away across the creek, came the sound of flying hoofs. The men listened. To them, brought suddenly back over the years to thoughts of Christmas, it might have been the patter of the hoofs of reindeer; but they knew it was Bill and the stage from Santa Cruz. The noise of the harness and brake and Bill's "Whoa, you," as he swept down on to the bridge announced him plainly enough, and in a moment his horses drew up panting in the glare of the Cañon lamps.

But one passenger got out—Hennessee, the owner of the mill. And a most unusual thing occurred. Hennessee, for whom most of them worked, asked them all in to have a drink. And when they were all set and stood, in the presence of their boss, more or less awkwardly over their glasses, he lifted his own high up above his head and said merrily,—

"Well, boys, here's joy and a merry Christmas to all of you tomorrow."

Out of their dumfounded surprise came only a murmur in reply. The row of empty glasses, drained to the dregs, was, perhaps, their best acknowledgment. Hennessee's own glass was the last to be emptied. As the men drank he glanced hastily down the line, searching for a face he knew was not there."

"Mighty funny thing, boys, just happened to Bill and me," he said, "down the road a bit."

The men were all attention.

"We got held up."

So astounding was this statement that its significance failed to penetrate at first and no one said a word.

"But it wouldn't have been so funny," he went on, "if it weren't for the way it was done and the person who did it."

A gleam of eager interest, if not intelligence, manifested itself along the bar, and the men gathered close about the speaker as he drew for them a graphic picture of the hold-up. In glowing colors he painted the lone highwayman, told of the strange order regarding the Wells Fargo box and the mail, and of the robber's apparent satisfaction in finding the worthless toys he was bringing home to his little girl.

"If Bill were not here to back me," he concluded, "I shouldn't have cared to say anything about it. You wouldn't have believed me. I can hardly believe it myself."

A breathless silence had prevailed. It was followed by a chorus of interrogations.

"Got any suspicions who it was?"

"Tall or short?"

"Any horse?"

"See which way he went?"

"Sure he was alone?"

But to only the first question did Hennessee pay any attention.

"Yes," he said very impressively, "I have a very strong suspicion who it was. So has Bill."

The men turned excitedly to the driver, and Bill, noting a twinkle in his late passenger's eye, caught its meaning and drawled:

"Well, I wouldn't like to accuse no one unjustly, but as near as I could judge, looking at him under difficulties and a mask, he seemed to me very much like—like"—the men leaned forward—"like some stray Santa Claus of the mountains who had run short of goods and just *had* to have them 'special things we was bringin' out."

There was a moment of doubt in the sincerity of this speech. Then a shout of laughter shook the room, and Hennessee's voice called them to fill up again for a health to the highwayman Santa Claus.

Great merriment prevailed, and everyone drank the toast—everyone save a small, red-headed boy, who stood unnoticed in the shadow of the bar, listening with all his ears, listening with all his might.

V.

"SANTA CLAUS run short of goods!"

The words said themselves over and over again to Reddy climbing the trail up the mountain. His heart sank. The real purpose of his night trip to Boulder, the whereabouts of his father, seemed lost in the blackness of this terrible fact: Santa Claus had run short of goods. Of all the story of the hold-up, every word of which he had heard with bated breath, this fact alone impressed him: Boulder would be left out. That he had failed to find any news of his father occurred to him, but he felt sure that by this time, since he was not at Boulder, he must surely be at the cabin. Now and again where the trail was clear in the moonlight he ran, and he whistled loudly where his way led through the blackness of the forest.

It was past midnight when he turned from the trail and bore away through the woods to his cabin. But he stopped suddenly as he came to the edge of the clearing. A bright track of light, bright even in the moonlight, stretched across the open space from the tree door to the woods. It seemed at first that the tree must be on fire; but there was no smoke, no sound of crackling wood, only a silent, beautiful light. He was afraid, and yet, as he stopped and gazed at it, he knew that it was not fear that stirred him. It was wonder, hope. Might it not be Santa Claus, after all?

Cautiously he stole to the opening in the tree and looked in. His little redwood, in a glory of beautiful Christmas things, burst upon him. With an exclamation of wonder and joy he rushed in and stood before it in ecstasy. Santa Claus had indeed come into the redwoods, had made even of his little redwood sucker a beautiful Christmas-tree!

In the leanto, back of the tree, Duncan Lewis had scarcely time to slip into his blankets with his clothes on before Reddy burst in upon him with the news of the wonder that had come to *his* tree.

"Dad," he whispered, "Dad, *he did come*. The tree's chuck full!"

Lewis turned over with a grunt of sleep and hid his face in his blankets.

"Dad, Dad, can't you understand? She *wasn't* fooling; he did come; my tree's full of things. Didn't you hear him putting them on?"

But still only his father's heavy breathing answered him.

Anyway, the "kids" should come and see right away, even if his father wouldn't wake up. It might all vanish before morning, or that highwayman Santa Claus come and take them all away.

With shakes and digs, one after another, Reddy aroused the sleeping children, making them sit up on the edge of their board bunks. Thus, in the bright light that came from the tree room, staring and gaping, they listened for the first time to a wonderful tale of a wonderful thing. What of it was dream, what of it reality, what the midnight imagination of their big brother, Reddy, only Lewis, glowing with more than one emotion beneath his blanket, knew.

The tale ended, Reddy formed them in line, according to size, then led them out into that land of the enchanted tree. Hand-in-hand they went, with wide-open eyes and mouths silently agape. Twice they circled the little redwood, twice stopped and stood in awe beneath its glory. But it was only the baby among them that spoke.

"O-o-o, Weddy," he said, "O-o-o, Weddy," and again, his little neck twisting for one last look at the beautiful thing as Reddy led them away with promises of a to-morrow, "O-o-o, Weddy!"

One after another the little ones dropped off to sleep. Even Lewis snored honestly. But Reddy, wide awake, stared out at his tree. There was no sleep for him. A curious idea had gotten into his round, red head, an idea that he could not get out. So he thought and thought, and, after thinking, determined upon action.

The thought came to him first as he showed the children the tree. It was in the form of a beautiful pink doll. The moment his eyes caught sight of it standing by the tree he knew that it could not possibly have been meant for any of them, and instantly the story he had heard at Boulder of the hold-up of the stage by the redwood Santa Claus came back to him. So beautiful a doll was meant for only one person in the

redwoods. There was no question in Reddy's mind as to who that person was. Santa Claus had left it here on his tree by mistake. He felt some disgust at so absurd a mistake on the part of Santa Claus. But there was only one thing to do about it, and that one thing he proceeded to do.

A candle or two still burned about the tree, but their light was flickering and unsteady. Nevertheless, Reddy had little difficulty in wrapping up the doll. Other things on the tree too now appeared to him as curiously unsuited either to the "kids" or to him. A small doll's carriage and a doll's silk parasol were chief among these.

"Well, you *must* have been rattled," he said, addressing the absent Saint, but then, finding a plausible excuse for the mistakes, he apologized: "But, of course, you didn't know there weren't any children up here that could use such nice things, did you? 'Cause you never been here before."

Unceremoniously he relieved the tree of its questionable articles. Tying them securely in a gunnysack, he threw the bundle over his shoulder, blew out the candles, and was off again down the mountain.

VI.

BOULDER was sound asleep. A faint line of light was just beginning to creep in back of the trees on the range in the east, but deep in the mountains one would hardly have called it morning. Bill, feeding his horses for an early start to the coast, saw a small boy, with a pack over his shoulder, cross the foot-bridge below his stables and climb the bank at the rear of the Hennessee house. Though it was too dark to distinguish features, Bill felt that it was Redwood Lewis. He was thinking of Reddy at that very moment, and that fact, as well as the sack that the boy carried and the direction he took, aroused the stage-driver's curiosity and he followed. A hundred yards in the boy's wake he too climbed the bank into the Hennessee back yard.

Reddy had stopped before the back door of the house and stood hesitating, as if uncertain how to proceed, when Bill came upon him suddenly.

With a smothered exclamation the boy rushed to him. "Bill, Bill," he whispered, drawing close, "what do you think's happened?"

Bill shook his head.

"I do' know, Reddy, 'nless it's Christmas."

"Yes, it's Christmas all right, but that ain't it. That old redwood Santa Claus, you know, that you said held up the stage 'cause he ran out of goods last night, well, he's just gone crazy; he's just gone and got everything all balled up."

Bill caught his breath. What was the boy telling him? Did he know about it, then?

But Reddy went on excitedly, yet all in whispers, for the Hennessee house was in darkness and no one astir.

"You see, Bill, I had a kind of a Christmas-tree all ready for him last night. It wasn't a real Christmas-tree, Bill, only a redwood sucker, you know, but it looked pretty good for a sucker, and you know, Bill, after he held up the stage he must just have got his things all balled up, 'cause he left lots of presents that I know he meant for Minnie Hennessee—dolls and things like that. I only found it out by accident when I was showing the kids the tree after I came back looking for Dad. And course, as soon as I knew it I had to bring 'em down. She'd been disappointed."

Bill's glare had grown into something terrible—a great grin that he was trying to keep serious. To Reddy, however, the expression was the perfection of interest.

"They're here in this sack," Reddy went on, lifting the gunny into Bill's arms, "and, Bill, won't you just write a note we can pin on and say that Santa Claus left 'em up at my house by mistake?"

But for Bill, old, hardened stage-driver that he was, such faith was too much. Tears came into his eyes. He caught Reddy off his feet and pressed the red head close against his breast.

"You little Brick," he said, "you little Brick!"

Then he wrote the note on an old envelope, and Reddy pinned it on and stood the sack by the door where the first one up must see it.

And as Christmas Day dawned pink over Boulder, Reddy whistled gayly up the trail, back to his own little redwood sucker.



A GIFT

BY HELEN M. RICHARDSON

"GIVE me your gold," I said to her:
She bent her stately head,
And all of Ophir's richest store
Within my hand she shed.

I held the gift as one on whom
A queen had deigned to nod;
Then, lifting high the yellow plume,
Said, "Thank you, Goldenrod."

DEATH AND LIFE

A VISION AT CHRISTMAS

By Clinton Dangerfield



IN the early days of men the Lord sent two powers on earth to have dominion over them. One of these was Death—the other Life.

The stern front of Life showed what he really was: unmerciful, exacting, swift to demand obedience to a thousand laws, swift to punish with the keen sword of pain when those laws were broken.

His eyes were the eyes of a war-lord; his hand as cold as iron—and as strong.

The tasks he set were many. Few of these were to the liking of the children of men, though some thinkers perceived that out of these heavy tasks came strength, also that if one wrestled with them stoutly one might even master Life himself and compel him to graciousness.

Now the other power—Death—was a woman.

Tall she was, but so perfectly formed that her height was no blemish. Sleepy-eyed she was, but her slow, sweet smile was so infinitely tender and lovely that in the midst of their tasks men stopped to gaze on her as she passed.

At last one of the young men followed her. She spoke to him,—her voice being that unspeakable music which not even a violin can outsing,—and the young man returned into the fields of Life no more.

Then a little child, weary of flower-gathering, pulled at her garment's hem, and all the workers held their breath, waiting to see what Death would do; for Life had painted her in very evil colors.

But Death lifted the child and laid her on her own deep bosom and sang to her.

As she sang the child slept, and an exquisite smile lingered on its lips, as though its visions were very fair.

Then Death held out the child that the workers might see, and cried:

“Oh ye who labor, beset with unending toil, see ye how I have blessed the child? Never more shall the heat of summer vex her, nor the cold of winter! I have made her deaf to sorrow and unmoved by the vibrations ye call joy. Forever shall her brow go unwrinkled, and

because she hath chosen me I will give her the key to Heaven's immortal gates."

And a worker cried,—

"Ye have blessed the child because she was your chosen one?"

The cry was a question.

Said Death dreamily,—

"As I gave the child peace, so would I give it to all who come to me—trusting me wholly!"

Looking out across the blazing fields she stretched her rounded arms and cried: "Ye are all mine! Lover of souls am I!"

And with one accord they threw down their tools and followed her into a far land, beyond the dominion of Life.

Now Life was vexed exceedingly by the unfinished task. He went straightway to the Lord and complained how Death had led away part of his workers.

And the Lord sent a great white angel unto the remainder and forbade them, through the angel, to hearken unto Death until they could serve Life no longer.

For the Lord knew that the stern dominion of Life must be, for the sake of the men he hoped to complete.

But only a few, a very few, of the children of men obeyed the angel. Let Death but pass the toilers, and her beauty was so great they continued to desert their posts and follow after her.

Then Life cried unto the Lord with a great voice,—

"Death seduces my servants!"

And the Lord said,—

"Deal with Death as thou wilt."

Therefore Life seized on Death and cut away her perfumed locks, and put on her a painted mask, most hideous to behold. And he sealed the lips of Death, saying, "Be thou dumb, and be thou no longer known as a woman." With this he cast over Death's wonderful form a black mantle, like a pall, and on it Life painted,—

"This is the King of Terrors!"

Then he sent Death forth, and thereafter whenever she came near the workers they fled from her and cried aloud unto Life,—

"Matters not how hard thy tasks, oh dear Life, if thou wilt but save us from this frightful Death!"

And Life said unto the Lord,—

"Have I not done well?"

And He answered in exceeding sorrow:

"Needs must thy work on Death stand. And this because of the weakness of men who were seduced by her beauty and who heeded not my angel's voice. Yet very differently had I planned for my people. For in the beginning I set the loveliness of Death plainly before them,

that they might endure their tasks happily, knowing how sweet the end would be. But they have defeated my wisdom. On their own heads be it!"

And Life went his way, satisfied. Thereafter, when a child or man became useless to him he cast it into the arms of Death, because its task was finished.

And the soul of Death sang to the soul of the mortal given her, though her lips were dumb, and she blessed it with an infinite blessing and bore it away.

But the toilers mourned greatly that Death should have dominion over one of their number, and they turned the more desperately to Life, who smiled sternly and was content.

WIND AND SNOW

BY MINNA IRVING

WHEN sleep had closed the lattices
 Along the village street,
 I heard the clang of iron mail,
 The ring of steel-shod feet.
 I pulled the muslin curtain by,
 Between it peering forth,
 And lo! beheld a wild gray knight
 Come riding from the north.

The frost was in his streaming hair,
 The ice was on his beard,
 He shouted shrilly as he passed,
 His cry was long and weird.
 He struck the boughs that barred his way
 And broke them in his flight,
 Across his saddle-bow he bore
 A maiden veiled in white.

My breath was frozen on the pane,
 My lips were blue with cold,
 When far away his strident voice
 Died out upon the wold.
 And when the clouded morning dawned,
 All colorless and pale,
 Before my door lay soft and white
 The maiden's snowy veil.

HIS HOUR OF GREATNESS

By Elizabeth Knight Tompkins

Author of "Her Majesty," "The Things that Count," "Talks with Barbara," etc.



IT was the middle of the afternoon on the twenty-fourth of December. In a studio in one of the big studio buildings in New York two men were standing in front of an easel holding a portrait to which they bore the relation of painter and subject. The latter was speaking.

"There is no doubt that it is the best thing you have done: it will do everything for your reputation. There is a life and an originality of treatment about it that people are bound to recognize."

"But the likeness?" asked his friend as he paused.

"Well, you have got my features there. That's my nose and mouth, those are my eyes; but the expression—my dear Nevil, I never looked like that in my life. You have mixed me up with some other sitter."

"How do you know that you never have that look?" Nevil Field demanded. "You never saw your face when you were off guard, never in your life. Now I have seen you with that expression—not often, I admit, but often enough to make me resolve to capture it. I am convinced that it represents the real you."

"How did you bring it there when you wanted to paint it?" the other man demanded with evident curiosity.

Nevil laughed, and his laugh had a touch of bitterness. "That's my secret," he said.

Robert Eustis glanced quickly at him, as if struck by a sudden suspicion or visited by a sudden remembrance, but he did not follow up the subject.

"Likeness or not, it certainly answers my purpose," he said instead. "My mother will be delighted with it."

"It is a picture that your grandchildren will fight over: it has a look of ancestry. You used to be rather an ugly young fellow, Bob, but I'll be hanged if you don't grow better looking every year of your life. We'll have you setting up for a professional beauty before long."

"And you making your fortune off photographs of this," Eustis answered with a laugh. "But where's Paul?" he asked abruptly.

"Virginia Ross took him out to see the shops in their Christmas finery," Nevil explained. "They'll be back soon."

"How is she—Miss Ross?" Eustis asked with a little hesitation

after a moment's pause. "I haven't seen her for a long time," he added.

"She is very busy. She has been painting the Van Brunt children and has made a good thing of it. It's a perfect shame—she could go so far, that girl, if her heart were only in her work."

"And isn't it?" Eustis demanded.

"Apparently not. She does her work conscientiously and well, because she was born with a great deal of talent and has acquired a certain power of application, but she doesn't live for it. If it were not for the welcome addition to her income, I don't believe she would care if she never saw a paint-brush again. People who feel like that never go beyond a certain point, of course."

"I wonder why she feels like that?" Eustis demanded, looking intently, even significantly, at his friend.

Nevil did not return his look as he answered:

"The trouble is that Virginia Ross is a woman before she is an artist. She is not a person whom a career, whom applause, can satisfy."

"And what can satisfy her?" Robert Eustis asked this with the resolute air of a man who has made up his mind to pursue a subject he longs to drop.

Nevil shrugged his shoulders, a trick which, together with a good French accent, was all that remained to suggest his student days in Paris. "Only the usual thing,—the one thing,—I fancy. There they come now," he broke off with evident relief. There had been a certain visible tension between the two men during the latter part of their conversation. "I hear Paul's excited chatter. I will let them in." His friend stopped him.

"Michael will let them in. Let me tell you what I came for. I want Paul to go with me to select presents for some little neighbors of ours in the country, and I thought you could join us later and we'd have dinner together."

"All right," returned Nevil. "But, Bob, I thought you were going home to-day?"

"So I am, by the nine o'clock train."

"Why don't you wait and go up with us in the morning?"

"I can't. You see, it would be forlorn for my mother to have her Christmas morning alone. Besides, I want to see her face when she sees my picture. I have some arrangements of various kinds to make too. All the children in the neighborhood are coming to skate Christmas afternoon. Michael reports that the ice is in beautiful condition. You must be sure to bring your skates, you and Paul. But why don't they come in?" he broke off. While he had been speaking his eyes had been on the door.

"No doubt they are talking with Paul's friend Michael," said Nevil.

As he spoke the door opened and a tall young woman appeared in the doorway. She smiled at Nevil Field and held out her hand to Eustis with a friendly little,—

"Well!"

"Have you bought out New York?" he asked.

"We did our shopping days ago. We were just looking to-day. Paul is crazy with excitement," she added, turning to the child's father. "He would be ill if it were to last much longer. He told me that he couldn't sleep last night for thinking of the good time he was going to have at Mr. Eustis's. Now he is making elaborate plans with Michael for his visit. He couldn't carry them all out if he were to stay a week instead of twenty-four hours."

"It is a satisfaction to invite a guest who is so flatteringly and undisguisedly delighted to come," said Eustis.

"I don't see how we can do anything to tranquillize him until after to-morrow," Nevil remarked. Virginia Ross had moved over to the portrait and was looking at it intently.

"Well?" said Nevil at last, as she did not speak.

"It is wonderful, wonderful!" she replied.

"Do you mean the technique or the likeness?" he demanded.

"Both," she replied.

"You don't really think my face ever wore such an expression as that?" Robert interposed.

Virginia turned to him with a slow smile that lit up all her face and transformed it. In repose her face was a little heavy.

"I don't think it, I know it."

"You have actually seen it?"

"I have."

"When?"

Virginia laughed. "Oh, that would be telling," she returned lightly. "Nevil has caught you in one of your moments of greatness, Mr. Eustis; that is all. It was very clever of him to do it, and that he has this power is the reason why he is going to be a great portrait painter."

"One of my moments of greatness! Have I ever had one?"

"I suppose we all have them, moments—or it may be hours—when we live on a distinctly higher plane than the one on which our everyday life is passed."

"Have I them?" demanded Nevil. "Have you ever seen me in one? I wish you'd ring a bell or punch a button when you do."

"I have often seen you in moments of æsthetic or emotional elevation. As to the moral upliftedness, which I suppose is what one sees in this picture, I don't know. At all events, you will have one before you die. Everyone with a soul does."

"Do you think my clerks would consider this a good likeness?" Robert asked.

"I am sure your mother will."

He laughed. "Ah, that is unkind," he protested.

"I didn't mean it so," she returned simply.

"I must go and get something to do this up in if Michael is to catch his train," said Nevil, looking at his watch.

"Do you suppose his wife has her moments of greatness?" Robert asked in a low voice after Nevil had left the room.

"Poor Emily!" Virginia exclaimed. "Perhaps she has—for her," she continued. "No doubt there was a certain greatness in her letting Paul spend his holidays with Nevil. You see, he might meet a model in the hall or see one smoke a cigarette." She spoke with quiet amusement rather than bitterness.

"How he adores that child!" Robert exclaimed.

"He is a different man when he has him with him," she returned.

"And yet she is your cousin!" he remarked irrelevantly.

"Yes, but I broke away from it early," she explained.

"How does she like your relation with Nevil?" he demanded resolutely.

"I don't know and I don't care. She has dropped me completely, and it isn't worth while trying to make her understand." She spoke wearily, as if the subject had little interest for her.

"Would she like it better if she did—understand?" he asked.

Virginia glanced up at him quickly. "Do you know——" she was beginning, but he interrupted her.

"Yes, I know. I am very impertinent. I beg your pardon."

"What is it you want to know?" she asked gently. "I can't see why it matters to you, but I have nothing to hide."

"Nevil and I have been friends since we were boys," he interposed.

"Yes; and I know the strength of your friendship for each other. It has been a very real thing."

"It has, indeed—to stand what it has stood," he returned with a sigh.

"Do you want to know whether we love each other,—is that it?—for I can't suppose that, knowing us both, your wondering goes beyond this?" There was a challenge in her tone, which he answered with a fervent,—

"God forbid!"

The tension of Virginia's face relaxed. "I will tell you——" she was beginning, when the door opened and Nevil came back into the room.

"Michael is going to do it up," he explained, and, taking the picture from the easel, he went out of the room, leaving the door open behind him, and returning before his companions could speak again.

"I say, Bob," he exclaimed, "Paul has been telling an interesting tale of the grand young lady he saw with you at Tiffany's this afternoon. He confided in me that he thought she was buying you a wedding-ring. He was quite indignant because Virginia wouldn't let him go up and speak to you."

"She was extremely good to look at," Virginia put in with a friendly smile.

"That was Miss Hamilton. I met her there by accident——" Robert was beginning, but he broke off as the other two commenced to laugh. "Hang it!" he exclaimed. "Of course, I look foolish if you act like that. I give you my word——"

"Oh, we understand perfectly," Nevil put in teasingly. Robert picked up a sofa-pillow and let it fly at him.

Nevil dodged, cowering down behind Virginia in an attitude of extreme fear. "Don't! You might hit me!" he pleaded, holding her skirt about him like a frightened child.

She patted him on the head. "Mother won't let him hurt you! Bad, naughty man!" she said caressingly. At this Robert dropped the game.

"I must go," he said, picking up his hat with an abrupt change of manner.

Virginia turned away to hide the smile of satisfaction on her face.

"We'll meet you at my rooms later," he said to Nevil.

"Why don't you invite Virginia to dine with us?" Nevil asked in a mischievous tone.

"I should be only too glad if she would come. Will you, Miss Ross?" he asked, turning to Virginia. She shook her head.

"It is not because I didn't do it of my own motion? I should have spent the evening kicking myself for not having thought of it."

She shook her head again. "No: I am one of those conceited people who think first whether they want to do a thing."

"And you don't want to do this?"

"I don't feel sociable. I am in a mood when my own society suits me best."

"You find this holiday season hard to bear?"

"I do. How nice that was of him!" she exclaimed, turning to Nevil.

"You mean that he didn't make a personal application of your remark, or that he invited you to dinner?"

"Most people's vanity would have been up in arms immediately. They would have exclaimed, 'It is evidently time I went,' or something else of that nature. Many would have tried to get a cut back at me."

"There is nothing small about Robert Eustis," Nevil remarked.

"No: and this is what your picture shows, so he that runs may read."

"That kind of sensitiveness gives away one's secret lack of serenity in regard to one's own importance. One doesn't have to be large-minded to discover that. I have too much vanity to betray my hurt feelings, even though I may be bleeding to death internally. I am not willing to admit the possibility of my being slighted," Robert explained with a laugh.

"Well, if you choose to put it that way," remarked Nevil.

Robert held out his hand to Virginia. "Good-by, then, if you really won't come."

"Why have I been standing all this time?" she exclaimed as the door closed behind him, sinking down into a big chair in front of the fire.

"It's your own fault. I suggested repeatedly that it was just as cheap to sit, and Bob offered you every chair in the room."

"I didn't think what I was doing. How nice and warm it is in here, Nevil: it is so cold outside. I am going to stay here for a while, if I may. I am so tired of my room—and of myself," she added reflectively.

"And yet you wouldn't go to dinner with us. I wonder why?" he said, taking the chair opposite hers and lighting a cigarette.

"That you will never know."

"Perhaps I know already."

She glanced at him quickly. "Perhaps you do," she replied, letting her gaze return to the fire. "You couldn't work if I didn't stay," she began presently, breaking the pause that followed her words. "It is getting too dark. But perhaps you were going somewhere?"

"No, nowhere. I was wondering what I should do with myself until it was time to meet Bob and the kid. We don't seem to have seen as much as usual of each other, Virginia. Give an account of yourself."

She sighed before she answered.

"It would have to be such a bad one. I despise people who complain of life."

Nevil reached out his hand and took a book from the table. He turned the leaves until he found the place he was looking for.

"Listen to what Maeterlinck thinks about it," he said, beginning to read. "Elles"—obscure lives, the man means—"Elles nous apprennent que, même au sein de grands malheurs physiques, il n'y a rien d'irréparable et que se plaindre du destin c'est presque toujours se plaindre de l'indigence de son âme."

"I know it: it's absolutely true," Virginia returned sadly. "But my soul is so poverty-stricken these days, Nevil. It's a regular beggar, whining for a crumb of comfort. Let me whine to you a little."

"Whine away," he said with an encouraging smile.

It was several minutes before she spoke. When she did, she took up her subject at a different point.

"I had such a strange dream before I awoke this morning. I seemed to be arguing with someone who had power over the workings of the universe. I suppose it was God. I was calling Him to account for the discrepancy between our young ideals and beliefs and life as we find it later. I said that it was manifestly unfair for us to be allowed to grow up in illusions, in beliefs behind which there was no reality. Take the wonderful sense of the romantic in life, take the charm of the things we have not yet experienced, the glamour that hangs about moonlight and natural beauty and music and poetry, the atmosphere pervading them that stirs our emotional nature and, yet, to which we cannot put a name. Now I said that it was unfair to put these things before us unless there were corresponding realities behind them. The same rule ought to apply to life as to detective stories: the solution must be adequate to the mystery. Now I have never found anything in life that corresponded to the promise. After a certain age everything is so empty."

"There is supposed to be one thing that fills the bill," Nevil interposed. "One thing that represents the reality behind the moonshine, the poetry, and the glamour—at least, so I have been told," he added with a smile.

"Then a beneficent power ought not to place it so utterly beyond the reach of most of us. But, to tell the truth, Nevil, I am afraid that I don't believe in the One Thing as I once did. As I look about among the people to whom it has come, I see only disillusionment, ennui, mutual irritation, and content in separation. Oh, how tired of each other the husbands and wives I know are! And what avails it to be given a thing one minute if it be taken away the next and the emptiness of life made all the more apparent. There is no use talking, life is a cheat, a regular bunco game."

"Did you tell this to your God?" he asked with interest.

"No: my dream was only a fragment, just a passing sensation from sleeping to waking. I had hardly begun on my grievances when I awoke."

"What was your God like?—anthropomorphic?"

"I don't even remember that. Of course, I could make a good story of it, but there was really nothing to it. Only I have gone on all day following up the train of thought. Oh Nevil, it is dreadful to be as dead as I am! Not to really want anything in Heaven or earth! It would be better for me if I were really suffering about something. This emptiness of life is killing me!"

"You seem to have a blessing or two, if you will forgive my mentioning them!" he interposed.

"Don't you suppose I know it? When I compare my life, its freedom and ease and all the rest of it, with that of other people, I feel as if

I ought to go down on my knees and thank God fasting." There was a pause while each followed the train of thought suggested by the end of the quotation, which she had left unspoken. Presently Virginia began again. "It is not that I consider my life hard as lives go. I know of none that I would exchange for it. My complaint is that after first youth all life is impossible to women who can both think and feel. It may be different for men. I suppose it is, they being so constituted that they can satisfy themselves with ambition, with acquisition, with impersonal things. But women——" She broke off abruptly and rose from her chair, glancing about in search of the furs she had laid aside.

"You are not going?" he demanded from the depths of the chair in which he had stretched himself out.

"Yes. I am ashamed of myself. I despise people who talk this way. You don't seem very happy yourself to-day, Nevil. You are thinking of something else. I am sure we should both be better alone."

Nevil closed the door behind her and came back to the fire.

"I'm a beast!" he said aloud as he sank into his chair once more and took up the train of thought he had been following while Virginia had been talking. For three-quarters of an hour he sat there, letting his cigarette go out for lack of attention, evidently absorbed in some perplexing thought. The problem before him was not a new one. For several years it had harassed him, lying in wait for every idle moment, thrusting itself between him and his work, usurping time that other interests claimed. Often after a long struggle he would lay it aside as settled, only to find himself again, on the first opportunity, marshalling the pros and cons against each other. The problem concerned itself with the eternal conflict between egotism and altruism. In the concrete, should he, Nevil Field, clear away the misunderstandings and bring together these two people who loved each other, when their gain meant his own loss?

He never could tell when and how the whole story had become so clear to him; but know it he did as certainly as if each had made him their father confessor. Years before Virginia had told him a tale with names and localities carefully suppressed or disguised, and of this he had come to know Robert Eustis the hero. It was all so plain to him now, this story that he would have given years of his life not to know. He knew that long ago Robert, then a poor man, had asked Virginia to marry him; that she, suffering because of another man, had refused him, with the further explanation, believed in the first disillusionment of youth, that she should never marry unless she married a wealthy man for what he could give her. Later she had grown to love Robert, but the money which he had made prevented her from showing herself accessible; and Robert, still loving her, had held back because of his belief that she returned his, Nevil's, own love. The case had been

further complicated by Virginia's jealousy of Elizabeth Hamilton, the daughter of Robert's partner.

If the two had seen each other often, no doubt they would have found each other out in spite of misunderstandings; but their infrequent meetings were only new opportunities for misinterpretation, for pretences of indifference, for mutual pain-giving. Virginia had come in fresh from the sight of Robert and Miss Hamilton together: she had met his friendliness with a manner compounded to represent indifference masked by assumed cordiality. The touch on Nevil's hair, the caress in her tones, had been for Robert's benefit, with the result that the two had parted farther apart than ever.

"Of course, if I had any real manliness, I should tell Bob the truth, that it is not I she loves," Nevil said to himself at last, stooping to put some wood on the fire. It was so easy to say, "Tell Bob the truth," but how much it implied! If Virginia did not love himself, at least she belonged to no other man. He was her friend; it was to him that she came for companionship and comfort. There was no one on earth so near to him as she was. If she married Robert, all that would be over. She would have thought and attention for no one else, being a woman to whom love was all in all. He knew just how she would treat him; would meet him with real pleasure, would ask him all about his concerns with apparent interest; but before he had answered one of her questions, an absent-minded expression would creep into her eyes and she would be dreaming of Robert. Things were bad enough as they were: the other he could not endure. He simply could not stand by and see their happiness, himself shut out.

His love for Virginia had been of slow growth and was all the stronger for that reason. She had come to make them a visit at a time when the strain of an uncongenial marriage had become intolerable, and afterwards, when he had at last found courage to break loose, she too had set up a studio in New York and had come to him for advice and criticism, becoming the centre of his life in a way he would not have believed possible, she was so different from the women he had hitherto found himself loving. Yet love her he did, not with the fire of early youth, perhaps, but with the depth and steadiness of maturity. To give her up was to take all happiness out of his life, his lonely life, in which he did not even have the companionship of his little son, except at long intervals.

Late the next afternoon, Christmas Day, Virginia sat in her room, looking out at the snow that had begun to fall only an hour before, although there had been promise of it all day. The temperature had risen greatly in the night and the day had dawned overcast and cheerless. Virginia had not left the hotel, shrinking from feigning a mood

appropriate to the day. She had sat with a book before her, reading little and thinking much, the same sad old thoughts. She had not gone down to the Christmas dinner that was served at two o'clock. The idea of sitting through it at a table with five other people, each of whom was utterly indifferent to every one of the others, was too intolerable, so she had eaten some graham crackers and an orange in her room.

There were some evidences of Christmas remembrances on the table, several books with their tissue-paper wrappings, red ribbon and sprig of holly lying beside them, a cake of violet soap, a vase of pink carnations, and a crimson cyclamen in a pot. Virginia looked at them occasionally but with no pleasure. She remembered that there were many people to whom material possessions brought happiness and thought of the difference between their attitude to life and her own; accused herself of ingratitude towards the givers of these gifts and acquitted herself of the charge. Gratitude could not be expected for that which was not desired. It was not gifts or the casual kindness sending them that she wanted. There was but one thing on earth that she desired and, lacking it, everything else was dust and ashes. She did not pity herself for having no home or near relatives, for spending Christmas in a hotel. Feeling as she did, it mattered little under what conditions she drew the breath of life.

It was nearly five o'clock and would have been dark except for the white reflection from the snow, when a knock came at her door.

"Come in," she called indifferently, expecting a bell-boy. To her surprise, she recognized Nevil Field by the light from the hall.

"I came directly up. I didn't have time to wait," he explained.

"What is the matter?" she demanded anxiously.

"Nothing now—I give you my word. Let me get my breath and I will tell you."

He took a chair at the other end of the register. "Don't look at me like that," he panted. "Nobody is any the worse. Paul fell through the ice and Bob dived under and got him out. I don't believe Paul has even taken cold."

"Oh!" she gasped as he paused for breath.

"I told you it was all right," he protested. "Bob hit his head and was unconscious for some time, but they say he did himself no real damage and will be as well as ever in a day or two."

"Then why are you here?"

"I came to get you to go up there with me. You know Mrs. Eustis is such an invalid, and Paul keeps asking for you. You could be of great service." He did not look at her as he spoke, and his voice was self-conscious and unnatural.

"Does Mrs. Eustis want me to come?" she demanded.

"Yes. She sent you a most cordial invitation. She says she would consider it a great kindness if you would come and look after Paul a little. The maids are very willing, but you know how he shrinks from strangers, and I am so helpless."

Virginia had risen. "When does the next train go?" she asked.

"You have fifteen minutes to get ready in. I will wait for you downstairs."

They hardly spoke on the journey out. Once Virginia asked a question about the accident, but stopped him before he could answer. The thought of what might have happened was too painful to them both for the thing to bear discussing. Mrs. Eustis was delightfully cordial. Virginia was made to feel herself a most welcome guest.

"I know all about you. Robert has told me about you," she said with an affectionate friendliness, after she had repeated the doctor's last encouraging report.

Mrs. Eustis seldom left her sofa. A maid showed Virginia her room and then took her to the one where Paul was. She found his father there.

"Hush," he said. "Paul has fallen asleep."

"I don't quite see why you brought me; Paul doesn't need me," she whispered reproachfully.

He took her hand. "Do you think I would put you in any position that would compromise your dignity?" he whispered back.

"No: I know you would not," she answered.

"Then will you trust me?"

"I will," she said, after a moment's hesitation, a light rising in her eyes that she tried in vain to hide.

"Then come with me." Still holding her hand, he led her down the hall to a room at the end.

She released herself and drew back as he started to open the door. "Is he in there?" she asked.

"Yes, and alone. I have just told him that I have brought you down and asked him if he would like to see you."

"What did he say?"

"I will leave him to tell you that." He opened the door and, again taking her hand, led her into the room, a large, square room, lit only by a blazing fire and a shaded lamp on a table. In the big four-post mahogany bed Robert Eustis was lying, propped up by pillows. His head was bandaged, but, except for a little pallor, he did not look ill.

"This young woman is afraid the shock of seeing her will be too much for you, Bob," Nevil began.

Robert held out his hand. "It might be, but not in the sense she means. Come over here and sit down by me. I want to realize that you are actually in my house at last. Have you had any dinner?"

"I am not hungry," she replied.

"Well, I am, ravenously. We'll have a feast by and by. The idea of cheating a man out of his Christmas dinner! Couldn't you really eat something?"

"I am afraid I ought not to talk to you," she protested, attempting no longer to hide the happiness in her face.

Robert laughed. "It's perfectly absurd, their keeping me in bed. My head aches, of course, as might be expected, but except for that I should never know I had been through the ice."

Virginia gave a shudder. "Oh, don't let's talk of it—I can't bear to! I am sure I shall dream of it!" she exclaimed.

"She is such a sensitive little thing," Nevil explained. There had been something strange in his manner from the first moment Virginia had seen him, but now it was even more marked—an appearance of strength, of resolution, of upliftedness. Both his companions looked at him in surprise. "You don't know, Bob, what queer ideas she takes into her head at times," he continued. "For instance, she thinks other people might imagine her capable of marrying them for their money. You wouldn't believe that of her, would you?"

"Never—not even on her own word! I know beyond doubt that if she ever allow a man the exquisite happiness of calling her his wife, it will be for the one reason."

There was something so significant in the manner of both men that Virginia was glad of the shadow in which she was sitting. Nevil walked towards the door.

"I am going to Paul," he explained.

"Oh, don't!" Virginia protested involuntarily, but he took no notice.

When he reached the door, he turned and said: "By the way, do either of you know of any artist I could engage to paint my portrait at the present moment? A tintype might do," he added whimsically. He closed the door behind him and they were alone.

"Virginia," Robert began in a low voice that trembled as he spoke,—“Virginia, Nevil told me just now that you had never loved him. I have never learned how not to love you. Is there any chance for me?"

Virginia flung herself on her knees beside the bed and buried her face in the clothes.

"Oh Robert," she sobbed, "that this should come to me on Christmas Day!"



THE BREAD ON THE WATERS

By *Alfred Sutro*

Author of "The Cave of Illusion," "Women in Love," etc.



MISS MARRISDAILE was conscious of a pricking sensation in her throat, but she restrained herself.

"I could stop in my bedroom, you know, dear," urged Miss Hartopp plaintively.

"It would fidget me, Lucy," replied Miss Marrisdaile, straining a smile to cover her impatience. "And this flat of ours is such a band-box—one can hear every word——"

Miss Hartopp raised protesting hands. "Oh Morrie! You don't think I would listen?"

Again Miss Marrisdaile essayed her wan, deprecating smile. "Of course not, Lucy—what an idea! But the mere notion that another person is within earshot—don't you see?—is disconcerting, that's all. And as I haven't the faintest conception of what he can want of me, or why he should ask to see me alone——"

Miss Hartopp giggled. "I'm sure that he means to——"

"My dear Lucy, don't be absurd. I hadn't seen him for ten or twelve years till I met him the other day. But it fidgets me, and I shall be more comfortable, that's all. Besides, you owe the Wilsons a visit——"

"As if they ever wanted to see me!"

"That's the mistake you make—you're becoming hypochondriacal, my child, and it's bad at your time of life!"

Miss Hartopp's pale blue eyes turned misty and her chin trembled. "I'm only two years older than you, Morvenna!"

"At *our* time of life, then! Buck up, Lucy, for God's sake! After all, we're not fossils! Go and see the Wilsons, and be bright and cheerful—you can, if you like. Good Heaven! they ask you to dinner, and that's worth something."

"They send me down with the parson," complained Miss Hartopp.

"A parson's better than nothing," answered her friend. "Our banquets at home aren't so remarkably festive that you can afford to quarrel with half your visiting-list. Go now, like a good girl."

Miss Hartopp smiled weakly and fumbled at her gloves. "Is my hat all right, Morrie?"

"Quite: it looks very well."

"Do you think I was wise to alter the ribbon?"

"Yes; it looks better that way."

"If only it doesn't rain——"

"My dear, you have an umbrella."

"If a drop or two fall on that hat, it will be ruined."

"The sun's shining, Lucy; there'll be no rain to-day."

"You think not? I saw quite a black cloud while I was dressing. Shall I take an omnibus, do you think, or the underground?"

Miss Marrisdaile heaved a deep sigh and her foot tapped the floor. "I should take whichever was nearest," she answered shortly.

Her friend was reproachful. "Oh Morrie, that's so like you! When you know that my face gets greasy if I have to walk in the sun!"

Miss Marrisdaile looked round the room before she spoke. "Mrs. Wilson won't bother about your face, Lucy."

"But I shall. I shall feel uncomfortable. Besides, there might be somebody there. Though I've rubbed a bit of cream on my handkerchief, and while the servant's opening the door——"

"Exactly; so that's all right. You had better go now, dear. Good-by."

Miss Hartopp offered her cheek. "I wish you would take a little more interest in me, Morrie."

"Lucy, Lucy, don't be silly."

"I know you're quite indifferent as to how I look. Of course, it's all right for you, with your complexion——"

"Are you going?" It had escaped her and she couldn't help it. Miss Hartopp gave a startled look, and with an "Oh Morrie!" she fluttered away, the outer door opened and closed, and rustling skirts flounced down the stairs.

Morvenna drew a deep breath, and her hand gripped a chair, seized it, and shook it. Then her eyes turned to the tiny clock on the mantel-piece. "Four already," she murmured. "He'll be here in half-an-hour!" And she went hurriedly to her bedroom.

Mr. Chambers found the ascent of the five floors fatiguing, and puffed considerably when he attained the last landing. He was a pleasant-looking man of forty-two or three, a trifle corpulent, and by no means of distinguished appearance; but he had kind gray eyes, and a certain air of strength somewhat corrected his massiveness. He paused for a moment as he stood outside; then pressed the bell and stared curiously at the door, which was opened by Miss Marrisdaile herself.

"How do you do, Mr. Chambers?" She had schooled her voice: it rang clear, but a tremor was there. "Come in. I'm glad to see you." He placed his hat and stick in the rack and followed her into the room. "Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Chambers let himself drop into a chair and looked at his hostess. "Do you know,—it struck me the other day,—you're not changed a bit."

Morvenna laughed. "I'm thirty-five."

"A woman's as old as she looks——"

"You're not changed much either. I *was* surprised when I saw you last week at the Martins'. And how are you?"

"Oh, I'm very well, thanks. You've a nice place here."

"They're not my things, you know, but my friend's. She loves all this bric-a-brac."

"Don't you?"

"Oh, I hate it! The room's small enough, and one can't stir without knocking something or other over. You knew her, by the way,—I wonder whether you will remember?—Lucy Hartopp."

"Hartopp? Dear me! a tall, graceful girl, who took such high honors at the University?"

"Yes, we're living together."

"Oh, that must be very pleasant. She's awfully clever, of course—and you always liked clever people."

Miss Marrisdaile bowed her head. "She had what they call brain-exhaustion five years ago—she had been working too hard—and was forced to give all that up."

"What a misfortune, poor thing! She was so brilliant."

"Yes, she overtaxed her brain. A woman's brain, it seems, can't stand very much. She had even to abandon her teaching. And now we two live together—for economy."

Mr. Chambers looked his sympathy. "And you still write, of course? I have read your books, you know."

"What an act of devotion!" She laughed. "I didn't know that you were one of my faithful two hundred."

"Two hundred?"

"Well, I published three books altogether, and that was the average sale."

"What a shame!"

"I don't know—they were poor stuff, really, although I didn't think so then."

"And I'm sure you don't now. Of course, my opinion's worth nothing, but—why, you had splendid notices!"

"One or two friends on the press spoke very well of them. But, at any rate, they didn't sell."

"You amaze me, you do indeed! Is that why nothing of yours has come out these last few years?"

"That is the reason. You see, publishers are scarcely philanthropists. I review,—when I can induce an editor to send me a book,—and I occasionally get a stray poem, or story, into a magazine."

Mr. Chambers could only say "Oh!" He was evidently very surprised, and fidgeted uncomfortably in his chair. Miss Marrisdaile broke the silence. "I was betwixt and between, you see—too good or too dull for the ordinary public, and not good enough to appeal to the people who really know. But we won't talk of myself—the subject's not fascinating. How about you?"

"Oh, I'm still in business, of course."

"And, I hope, prosperous?"

"Oh, yes, I've done very well. It's hard work, but I like it. You see, it's all I'm fit for,"—he laughed,—“as you used to tell me.”

Morvenna bit her lip. "Did I? I was a great fool in those days."

"Not at all, you were quite right. But I never was good at learning. Dear me, how I tried to read the books that you read!"

He fairly bubbled over at the recollection; then he took a more sombre tone.

"You will have heard of my poor wife's death—a little more than two years ago. She wasn't clever, you know—she was like me. But we weren't very happy."

"I am sorry. You have children?"

"Three: two girls and a boy. How strange it is that we should never have met, all these years, till last week!"

"I go out very seldom."

"I saw you once—at a first night at the Royalty. A friend of mine—at least, not exactly a friend, but I had helped him with money—had a piece done, and he gave me a ticket. In the dress-circle, you know—front row. And I saw you down there—in the stalls."

"Why didn't you speak to me?"

"Oh, you seemed to know everybody, and I hadn't the pluck!" He laughed merrily. "You were such a swell! Shaking hands with all the distinguished people in London, and I felt as though 'auctioneer' were written all over me."

Miss Marrisdaile smiled rather grimly. "The people weren't, perhaps, quite as distinguished as you think. Oh, do you know, I'm really very glad to see you, to have met you again! You bring quite a whiff of the old days. It must be about fifteen years ago that you first came to the house with poor Harold. What great friends you were!"

"The best chap I've ever known, he was."

"Yes. Poor Harold! My life might have been different if he hadn't died."

"Aren't you happy then, Morrie? Oh, I beg your pardon." He rose, and looked as though he had done something wrong. She smiled softly at him, and a tinge of faintest pink spread over her cheek. "I like you to call me Morrie," she said. "Why not? We're such old friends. We needn't be stiff with each other, Tom!"

The man looked at her out of his pleasant eyes and held out his hand, which she took. Then he sat down again and heaved a deep sigh of content.

"I'm glad you feel like that," he said; "it helps me a lot. Oh, yes, we're friends, and I'm a good friend—I'll say that. And, look here, I'll come to business straight away. You must have been very surprised when you got my letter?"

"Well, I was, of course. You told me I could do you a favor. By the way, how did you get my address?"

"In 'Who's Who.'"

"What, have they still got me there? That's wonderful too."

He leaned over and beamed at her. "My dear Morrie, you're a celebrity, and don't seem to know it."

She smiled rather wanly. "A celebrity! Well, we won't talk about that. But I like you to think that I am. And now, what is this favor?"

Mr. Chambers turned sheepish and looked almost furtively at her. "I want to marry again."

For a moment the room danced in her eyes. The thought she had not dared to formulate, that had been throbbing within her ever since she received his letter, now stared at her, shrieked in her ears. Dear God, it was true then! She saw, in a flash, her solitary, wretched existence now already behind her; her evenings of dull, bitter pain, her hopeless waking, her pillow wet with powerless, futile tears. The bold front crumbled that she had held to the world; love, the impossible, for which she had dared no longer even to yearn, love stood there. A man who saw her with the eyes of ten years ago, with eyes that were blind to her wrinkles, her faded hair, her wasted and shrunken figure. A heart on which she could rest her poor, weary heart: sympathy, sympathy—and, in the dim future, perhaps even children. And through the mist, the rainbow, her eye sought him who was hers, her own, her lover, her husband; she beamed on him hungrily, and all the while her face was rigid and calm, and she heard herself say, "So you want to remarry?"

He was swaying about in his chair and cracking his fingers. "Yes, Morrie, I do."

Oh, the luxury of being able to ask herself whether she would take him or not, this man she had so scornfully rejected twelve years ago! The dear delight, the keen gladness, of pretending to debate! There

was a side of her that marked, with a sneer, his huge hands and feet, his narrow forehead and double chin; that branded him "tradesman!"—a man who sold chairs and tables, bedroom suites. And she egged on this other self to advance its silly objections, to point out his clumsy boots, the way he breathed through his nose—his entire lack of higher culture, or feeling for art. And in that second of silence she floated on a broad river, and lilies rose up around her and covered her face, and there was music,—sweet, happy music,—and her soul was singing. Joy overwhelmed her; she half-closed her eyes as she thought of the lips that would soon be kissing her lips, of the shoulder her tired head would lean on, of the arm—the strong, strong arm—that would clasp her waist and scatter her cares. Oh God, dear God, this was good of Thee! At last, and at last!

"And as she's a niece of yours, I fancied that you——"

Had she heard? Was it true? Was it real? Rushing waters drowned her, she felt herself die. Her heart gave one leap and stopped. Miserable tears streamed from her eyes; all control, all restraint, had left her; she wrung her hands feebly as she sobbed and moaned, "I thought you meant me!"

"Morrie!"

He had sprung to his feet, and looked as though he had struck her, had stabbed her. All his roughness was gone; he shook, and yearned at her grief.

"Yes, I did! I thought you meant me!"

She didn't care, she didn't care! All was too black around her—too black—too black—too black! The hopeless future caught her again and crushed her; she saw the long procession of wretched to-morrows. Her biting pain broke down every barrier: she didn't care, she didn't care! And then he leaned forward and touched her; and, with a gasp and a cry, she seized hold of the reins—and lifted her head—and smiled.

"Sit down," she said, and her voice rang clear. "Oh, what a pretty exhibition!" She let her tears dry on her cheek and she waved her hand at him. "It's all right, and it's funny too. I *did* think you meant me! And—dear Lord!—I should have jumped at you! There! Open confession, you see. What a good fellow you are not to laugh. And now, after this little attack of hysteria,—my life is dull, you know, and I suppose I feed on myself,—now tell me, which is it, which of the two—Hilda or Maggie?"

He could not speak. He had looked into a woman's soul, and its loneliness appalled him: he was silent as before the dead. His fingers twitched; all that was unconscious within him was striving for utterance, clamoring to pierce the wall. He could only murmur, "Morrie, Morrie!"

Miss Marrisdaille was quite calm now. "My dear Tom," she said, "sit down. Collect yourself." And she laughed. "With your leave; we'll forget all this. I was rather rude to you, I believe, twelve years ago: very disdainful and haughty,—Heaven knows why!—and you've had your revenge."

"Oh Morrie! Revenge!" The man looked broken and wan, and his eyes were moist.

"Let us call it poetic justice. But, mercy, see what a hostess I am! I've forgotten the tea! Stop there—I'll bring it. We've no maid."

She went, and came back in ten minutes, bearing a tray, of which he relieved her; and she poured out the tea, and gave him a cup, and sipped her own, calmly. All her old, brave reliance had returned to her; and she had smoothed her hair, and her eyes bore not a trace of their tears.

"My dear Tom," she began, "you've a very good heart,—you always did have,—and I see I've upset you. Oddly enough, I'm not half as ashamed as I should be. I feel that I owed it you somehow—I *was* such an arrant fool when I was a girl! And this thing makes a link between us—we'll always be friends. And now let's be sober and serious and talk over your affairs."

Mr. Chambers got up and held out his hand. "I think I had rather——"

"You needn't. I assure you it's quite all right now. My dear man, I did have a mad sort of notion—but I knew it was mad. If you leave me now without telling me I shall feel horribly ashamed. If you are, as I take you to be, my honest and faithful friend,—and I assure you I want a friend!—you will forget my hysterical folly, and sit down, and quietly discuss things." He paused for a moment, but her smile reassured him; he went back to his chair. "That's right! And now, which is it—Hilda or Maggie?"

Mr. Chambers turned very red. "Oh, I——" he murmured, and stopped.

"Come, come," urged Miss Marrisdaille, "you must tell me. I imagine it's Hilda?"

He nodded shamefacedly.

"She's the prettier of the two, of course. Does she know?"

He cleared his throat: "I fancy she has some idea——"

"Tell me, why did you want my advice or opinion?"

"Well, she's only twenty, and I'm forty-three. And I've a sort of suspicion, at times, that her mother—may be putting some pressure upon the girl."

Miss Marrisdaille toyed with her spoon. Hilda! Hilda's mother had married when her sister was little more than a child. She had fallen vaguely in love with a clerk in the City, and had led a discontented and reproachful existence ever since. There had never been

much sympathy between the sisters, and they met but rarely. And Hilda had inherited the feeble prettiness of her mother, the feeble intelligence too: she was vapid, foolish, caring only for dances, tennis, amusement, her one anxiety to "marry well." What sort of a wife would Hilda make for this honest, simple man? And her eyes signalled warning, but her woman's loyalty held her back: she could not spoil the girl's chance—her niece, after all. And besides, what would he require of his wife? She would give him all he would want, perhaps—Hilda, that little goose, with her pink and white face and her fat, foolish eyes! Oh men, men!

"What do you think?" asked Tom Chambers.

"How old are your children?"

"The boy's nine, and the girls seven and four. They're dear little things and very affectionate. But they need a mother, you know."

A mother! Oh, she would have loved them! She would have taken these orphans to her heart, her lonely heart that had nothing to care for!

"Hilda's a bit young, of course. You're twenty years older. That's the only objection I see—and it isn't a grave one."

Yes, the face, the face—that was all that they cared for! Hilda to educate children,—Hilda, who devoured novelettes and had not an idea in her head!

"Of course, she's young," said Mr. Chambers, "and I feel that it's just a bit foolish. But the fact is, you see——"

"You're in love with her?"

His sheepish look gave the answer. She crossed her hands on her lap and smiled. "Then marry her, my dear man. Be her master, that's all, and don't believe that because she's young, and you're not, she's making a magnificent sacrifice. The girl's all right. She needs guidance, of course, but you'll see to that. Marry her, by all means. You might do much worse. Let me see, I'll be your aunt." And she laughed.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Morrie?" There was a deep ring in his voice.

"Nothing, nothing, except—though I don't think I need ask it—never to let Hilda know."

"You need not ask it." He was reproachful.

"No, I feel that. Well"—she made a half-gesture, as though to imply that the conference was ended. But he did not rise.

"I'm afraid you're not happy," he said.

"Happy!" She smiled. "Don't take an advantage over me, Tom. I showed myself to you as I have never done before, or shall again, to a living soul. You asked me to marry you twelve years ago, and I wouldn't: and I'm an old maid,—a dreary, fusty old maid. That's all. I wrote poetry, and thought that was life. Two or three men

besides you made me offers—I talked of art, and scorned domesticity. I didn't know, then, that art meant living with Lucy Hartopp, and dining off tea and a boiled egg, and having nothing in this world to do or care for."

"Then your books——"

"Don't you see? I know nothing of life, of real men or women. When I was young and a fool I wrote about delirious love, and blinding passion, and fustian like that. I thought I was a genius. Yes, I did, you know—it's a fact. I was half-baked, as all women are who exclusively live by the brain. And I've got just what I deserved. That's all. It's not worth making a fuss about—and I don't, as a rule."

"You're still quite young—it's not too late——" He felt he had bungled, and blushed; she only smiled.

"Everything's too late for me, Tom. At least I've this much to be grateful for—my father left me a hundred a year, and I make another fifty or so by my writing."

"Fifty!" He stared his amazement.

"Did you think I was rolling in wealth? Oh, I can tell you, there are thousands of single women who'd give ten years of their life to be as well off as that! Lucy has a hundred a year too,—they gave her a pension,—and we club together. Of course, it's not luxury—but at least we have this place, which is home, of a sort, and need not pinch or scrape too much. Oh, things might be a good deal worse!"

"You don't keep a servant?"

"We've a woman who comes in the morning. It's comfortable enough. And Lucy's a very good cook—poor thing! it's all she can do."

"Can I help you in any way, Morrie?" he asked very gently.

"Not in the least, my dear friend. Go and propose to Hilda. I shall be at the wedding, of course."

"And you'll come to see us?"

"Oh, yes. Why not?" Go to see them! See Hilda there!

"Good-by then." He rose. "You'll remember—if there's anything I ever can do for you——"

"Oh, yes, I'll remember." She held out her hand.

He insisted. "Anything, anything. And see,"—he fished out a card,— "this is my business address. A word sent to me there——"

"That's nice of you, Tom. Oh, yes, if I ever should want you, or you me,—who knows?—we can count on each other. And I hope you'll be very happy. Oh, I hope it with all my heart!"

They stood for a moment and looked into each other's eyes; then shook hands, and he went, and she heard him fumbling for his hat and stick in the dark little hall; then the outer door closed, and Miss Marisdale sat in her chair and stared at her empty teacup.

A CHRISTMAS FOLK-SONG

BY LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

THE little Jesus came to town;
The wind blew up, the wind blew down;
Out in the street the wind was bold;
Now who would house Him from the cold?

Then opened wide a stable door,
Fair were the rushes on the floor;
The Ox put forth a hornèd head:
“Come, little Lord, here make Thy bed.”

Uprose the Sheep were folded near:
“Thou Lamb of God, come, enter here.”
He entered there to rush and reed,
Who was the Lamb of God indeed.

The little Jesus came to town;
With ox and sheep He laid Him down;
Peace to the byre, peace to the fold,
For that they housed Him from the cold!



THE ADMONITION OF THE STAR

BY SUSIE M. BEST

I HEAR the Star of Bethlehem
Proclaim this truth to me:
“If in thy heart Christ hath no part,
My light thou canst not see.”

I hear the Star of Bethlehem
In tones admonitive:
“This light of mine on him must shine
Who would in glory live.”

I hear the Star of Bethlehem:
“Renounce thy sins to-day;
No longer blind, thy soul shall find
The Life, the Truth, the Way.”

I hear the Star of Bethlehem:
“To him who wills ’tis given
That he may be eternally
Co-heir with Christ in Heaven.”

"HIS WIFE"

By Tryntje Dubois



MRS. HARLON held the pistol in her hand and examined its mechanism with an absent-minded frown. The loads lay in a glass of water on the table beside her; presently she picked them up in her fingers, dried them on her handkerchief, replaced them in the empty chambers of the revolver, and, crossing the room, laid it on the chimney-piece.

Then she sank her hands deep in the wide pockets of her Empire dressing-gown, compressed her lips for an instant, sighed heavily, and rung the bell. To the responding servant she said briefly,—

"I want to speak to your master;" and then she turned towards the window and waited while the man went through the many corridors that lay between the private suite of his master and mistress and the billiard-room, where all the men of the party were making a jolly end to a rainy day.

A telegram had just come for Hughes, summoning him to town by the midnight express. Chamberlaine, who had arrived late and had to share his friend's apartment, was so overjoyed at the prospect of a whole bed to himself that he offered to drive him across country to the train. He regretted the offer directly he had made it, but Hughes had exhibited so much pleasure in his acceptance that it seemed impossible to withdraw. While they were discussing the matter the man came in with Mrs. Harlon's message. There wasn't a fellow present who would not have been less surprised if their hostess had sent for himself—Mrs. Harlon being "that kind of woman." Harlon flushed with a mixture of importance and pleasure and quitted the room at once. After he was gone all the men but Hughes laughed: Hughes didn't laugh because he was scribbling an order to send to the stables.

Then Chamberlaine became sober all of a sudden. "I don't believe I'll go, after all," he said, "it's raining harder than ever."

Hughes walked across to the bell-rope.

"Don't go back on a friend, Billy," he said as he rang, "I need you to-night."

Harlon, as he hurried along the halls, wondered what his wife wanted. He wasn't the sort of husband whose presence is frequently demanded. He was that species of innocuous male who is afraid of his own mounts, rarely understands the talk at his own table, and never

makes the acquaintance of the woman he marries. He felt very important to be summoned like that; he didn't know just why, but it made him feel good, it made him feel as if he were a person of consequence, and he decided that the next time a question was to be settled he would be very decided and have his own way.

Then he opened the door of the boudoir and saw her sitting there alone by the fire, and somehow all his independent ideas deserted him, and he recoiled abruptly into his usual deferential attitude towards the creature who contemplated the flames and agitated her gilded slipper with an air of haughtiness unparalleled.

"You—you sent for me."

She turned and looked towards the voice, then rose up and stood there, resting her hand on the chair-back. Her gown of velvet hung in great, golden folds around her, and the firelight outlined the splendor of her hair and throat and form. She was a strikingly beautiful woman—the sort of woman who wisely chooses to marry a man both moral and dense. She stood there now, measuring him and measuring herself, and then, at last, she spoke,—

"I sent for you because I wanted to know how much courage and how much greatness of character you possess."

Harlon, being masculine, naturally was as completely sure of the possession of every desirable attribute as he was unaware that his ears stood out and his legs were bowed.

"Anything you want, Ada," he said, "you know you can have."

As he spoke he could hear that his words did not sound quite up to the occasion, although it must be admitted that as a general rule none could be better suited to alleviate any female woes, be their cause great or small.

Mrs. Harlon levelled her big, glorious eyes upon him and smiled.

"Thank you," she said. "I have made up my mind that the only thing to do is to confess the whole to you."

Harlon looked frightened.

"My—my dear," he stammered—and then his legs trembled so that he had to sit down.

Mrs. Harlon came towards him and knelt at his feet, leaning her crossed wrists upon his knees; his heart beat so hard that she could feel the throbbing in his legs.

"It's Mr. Chamberlaine!" she announced without any further preparation, and then she buried her face in her hands and began to sob violently.

Harlon recoiled. He was a good man, but he did read the papers enough to understand his apparent situation.

"Ada," he said, and stopped just short of "my dear," and shook violently with a nervous chill.

"I haven't done anything wrong," said the weeping wife, continuing to hide her face.

"I never did think much of Chamberlaine," said Harlon, trying to recover his equanimity and failing utterly.

"You must be very brave," she whispered.

"I'll defend you with my life," he answered, and took out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead,—*"tell me all."*

"I knew him before I was married," she went on. "I used to write to him. He has all my letters, and none of them are dated." She began to cry very hard indeed. "Do you know what he said to-day?—that he would bring them all to me to-night if—if——"

"The villain!" said Harlon with energy.

"He has been threatening me for a year, and I have been almost crazy——"

She paused and lifted her beautiful, tear-stained face up to his.

"Ah, my husband, *are* you magnanimous enough to forgive me, to stay here and meet him, and then to force him to surrender the letters?"

Harlon gasped. The memory of Chamberlaine rose up before him like that of some evil genius.

"Oh Ada," he said, "can't I write him a note?"

Mrs. Harlon started to her feet and crossed the room to the mantel.

"He will be here in ten minutes," she cried hastily. "See! Here is a pistol. He will be unarmed and totally unsuspecting. You must take him by surprise, and then overcome him. I know you can do it." She lifted the pistol and showed it to him with a smile.

"My hero!" she murmured, and left the room.

The door had not closed behind her when Harlon precipitated himself upon the pistol, seized it gingerly, carried it to the window, and threw the loads out on the damp grass below.

"There might have been an awful accident," he said, with pale lips. Then he put the pistol back on the mantel, turned out the light, and sat down to spend the worst minutes he had ever known. He remembered Chamberlaine's attempt to get out of driving Hughes to the train. Forgotten his project, eh!—the villain!

The husband tried to grit his teeth, but they persisted in chattering instead; then he heard a stealthy tread in the hall, and the cold beads of perspiration started out all over him. He pressed the button with his shaking hand and the room was suddenly illumined.

In the midst of the glare Chamberlaine stood bewildered. He had on a mackintosh and carried an umbrella. The expression on his face so nearly approached fright that Harlon felt suddenly courageous and advanced boldly.

"I know all," he said impressively,—*"all."*

Chamberlaine was close to the door. He said, "There's some mistake," and turned to go.

Then all the pent-up fury which the inoffensive husband of a flirtatious wife may accumulate during eight or ten years of married life suddenly boiled up in the veins of Harlon and led him to spring upon his guest. But the latter was slippery to catch on account of the mackintosh, and as he jumped backward he handled his umbrella so neatly and dexterously that his host paused in his onslaught and backed towards the mantel. The next minute the revolver-barrels gleamed on the scene.

Chamberlaine's whole attitude altered at once.

"You're mad!" he said coolly, and with incredible speed and dexterity he rushed upon the other man, knocked the weapon out of his hand, threw him to the ground, and pinned him there, helpless.

"Now kindly explain?" he said as he looked quietly down on his panting host. "Are you out of your mind?—or what is it?"

"You villain!" gurgled Harlon, "you come into my house by invitation and then try to barter my wife's honor against her girlhood's folly."

"Go on," said Chamberlaine, "I want to know exactly what I am supposed to be committing to-night."

"I want those letters. She has told me the whole story."

"Whose letters?"

"Her letters."

"She never wrote me a letter in her life."

"What!"

"I say she never wrote me a letter in her life."

"What did you threaten her with, then?"

"I never threatened her. What should I threaten your wife for?"

"What did you come here for, then?"

"Hughes told me to wait here for him. I was to have driven him to the train."

As he spoke Chamberlaine loosed his grip and rose to his feet. Harlon rose too.

"Where is Hughes now?" he asked.

"I suppose he's gone. He had to make the fast express. He wouldn't have waited for me when I didn't come—he isn't that kind, you know."

The two men looked at each other, and the look grew into a stare, and the stare bred a sort of understanding.

"Hughes sent you here," said Harlon very slowly, "and my wife sent me."

"I occupy the room with Hughes," said Chamberlaine.

"And I——"

Harlon stopped.

Across the stillness of the wet night sounded the whistle of the fast express.

A BALLAD OF THE NATIVITY

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

NOW it was Mary dreamed this dream,
Ere yet her Child was born
In that poor place in Bethlehem,
In that poor stall forlorn,
Before the dark of night had fled
And given place to morn.

She fell asleep and dreamed this dream
That filled her heart with fear—
That she had died that One might live
Whose life was very dear,
And that she never saw His face
Or dried His earliest tear.

She dreamed that her own life went out—
Her life divinely sweet—
Ere she could press His little hands
Or kiss His little feet,
Or know the bliss that was to make
Her womanhood complete.

She dreamed she died before she knew
The trembling joy to say,
"I am a mother, I whose life
So bleak was yesterday;
I know at last that perfect hour
For which all women pray."

Oh, strangely came this dream to her,
This dream of utter woe,
While through the dark Judean night,
Above the wastes of snow,
A star flamed in the midnight heaven
And set the East aglow.

And ere the pallid dawn had come
To break her sacred rest,
She wakened with a startled moan
And tears the bitterest,
And lo! she felt two little hands
Clasped close upon her breast!

THE PASTRY-KNIFE PASS- OVER

By Mary and Rosalie Dawson

FROM MISS DOROTHY BROOKS TO MRS. JOSEPH L. LUKENS.

NEW YORK, December 23.

DEAR MINNIE: I'm really ashamed to think what a bad correspondent I've been lately. The worst of it is that I haven't the least shadow of an excuse—just pure laziness. I haven't been going round much, or doing anything in particular, that I can remember. However, even my abominable laziness couldn't let this season go by without writing to wish you a happy Christmas and all possible good-luck for the coming year.

Yesterday I forwarded you a remembrance in the shape of a silver pastry-knife. I hope a pastry-cutter can't cut friendship. If it can, you must send me a penny. How is my godchild, and what bright things has she been saying lately? I've no news of any kind to make this letter interesting, but I hope you'll forgive my long silence and write soon.

By the way, you've heard, haven't you, that my engagement to Mr. Metcalf is broken? We came to a mutual decision that it was a mistake, after all, and released each other some days ago.

Please give Joe my best wishes for the season. As ever, lovingly yours,

DOROTHY.

FROM MRS. JOSEPH L. LUKENS TO MISS ISADORA HUNTER.

PHILADELPHIA, December 25.

DEAREST ISADORA: Thank you so much for the cake-dish. It was just what I needed. It matched my Dresden tea-set so beautifully that I know you must have had that in mind when you picked it out, and thought makes a gift doubly appreciated.

You see, I remembered that you were a housekeeper too this year, and sent you something practical—a silver pastry-cutter. I hope you will find it useful, and that a pastry-knife can't cut friendship. If it can, you must send me a penny.

How is your housekeeping coming on up to date? I was so glad to hear that you were suited at last in Miss O'Rourke. As I mentioned in

my note, we found her cooking perfection itself. But oh, my dear, the expense! She wanted all the implements and conveniences they had in the cooking-school. Joe said he didn't mind addressing his cook as "Miss," but if we didn't want to spend every penny of his income on pots, pans, and improvements, we'd have to make up our minds to call a halt somewhere. He was convinced there never would be anything resembling peace in the house until we tore out the entire rear part of the building and rebuilt it according to her ideas.

So I decided to call a halt, and made up my mind to refuse the very next thing she asked for. It happened to be a patent mayonnaise mixer. Miss O'R. seemed to think it was a vital necessity, but I assured her that we'd managed to exist eight years without it, and that I'd no idea of adding further to my kitchen outfit at present. She looked at me witheringly, as if I were Mrs. Ham, Shem, or Japhet housekeeping in an ark, and gave me notice on the spot.

By the way, you remember Dorothy Brooks, who was visiting me last spring, don't you? We were all so much interested in her love-affair with that good-looking Mr. Metcalf. I think I told you that they became engaged in the fall. Well, Dot has written me that it's all off. Poor child, she did her best to write casually about it—said they'd agreed mutually that it was all a mistake. But I know Dot too well to be deceived by such unnatural calmness. She's one of those loyal, steadfast natures that doesn't change in an hour or a day. There's not a strain of fickleness in her character, so I feel positive the change must have been on his side.

I always took credit to myself for that match, because they were first introduced at our house. He was visiting in Philadelphia at the time—staying with some elderly relations of his.

I wonder if you know the romantic way they first met. She was on a runaway trolley and it was Mr. Metcalf who saved the situation, averting a panic. He calmed the women passengers by his presence of mind and persuaded them not to jump, so that when they finally got the brakes to work not a soul was injured.

Dot came home that afternoon terribly excited and gave us a most glowing description of the plucky stranger, his wonderful influence over the women in the car, and all that sort of thing. From her account he was a sort of combination of Hercules and Adonis in a tweed suit. She said among other things that he was so "magnetically masterful" that when he smiled any woman in the car would have obeyed him if convinced she was going to certain destruction in doing it.

Of course, she hadn't the least idea who he was, or that she'd ever see him again, so when he turned up that evening at dinner and she recognized him as her hero Joe was in his glory. He insisted on repeating everything she had said about Mr. M. before the whole tableful

The Pastry-Knife Pass-Over

of people. Of course, Dot was horribly embarrassed. She sat there blushing and protesting in a low voice. Her blushes were very becoming, though, and, besides, she had on a stunning imported gown.

Mr. Metcalf could hardly take his eyes off her. Joe kept up his allusions to magnetically masterful men all evening, and Dot continued to blush, and altogether it was the prettiest little beginning for a romance. I shall never be able to forgive Howard for bringing it all to nothing.

Well, my dear, be sure to answer this long letter soon. If I don't see you before the New Year I wish you a very happy one. Yours very affectionately,

MINNIE LUKENS.

P. S.—The children are all well and send love. Ada and Tony Fletcher have fallen out after three months of "crush." It appears he's been devoting too much attention to some little girl at the dancing-class. Her father was trying to tease Ada about him the other evening. To our great amusement she tossed her head and said, with an air of great indifference, "Tony! Oh, he has a new *inflame* now."

And she is only seven. I shall be having her heart-affairs to worry me next.

FROM MISS ISADORA HUNTER TO MRS. RODNEY SKIPWITH JONES.

PHILADELPHIA, January 2.

MY DEAR GEORGINA: No doubt you are wondering why I have not written to express to you my thanks for the beautiful inkwell, which reached me on Xmas morning and was deeply appreciated.

To tell the truth, I have been so immersed in housekeeping that I really seem to have time left for nothing else. Mother, as perhaps you know, is South for her health, and the burden of household cares has descended for the first time on my shoulders. For the first time, also, I learn how shamefully ignorant of such things I am. But I am going into the subject thoroughly at present, and hope ere long to be conversant with all branches of domestic science. I attend Mrs. Flower's cooking-class every morning from ten to twelve, and I have also entered upon a course of household economics which is held three afternoons a week. These, in connection with the practical care of the house, keep every hour occupied.

You've no idea, Georgina, what a difficult time I had to procure a capable cook. It is only recently that I succeeded in getting a person of the type I wanted. She's a graduate of two cooking-schools and is thoroughly up in modern methods. Miss O'Rourke was with Minnie Lukens for a short while before she came to me. You've heard me speak of Minnie. Well, she—that is, Miss O'Rourke—gave me a most surprising account of the Lukens' kitchen. She said that both furnish-

ings and utensils were absolutely archaic. She had the greatest difficulty in persuading them to purchase anything in the least modern. In fact, Minnie herself admitted to me that she let Miss O'Rourke go rather than buy a patent mayonnaise mixer. It is astonishing how unprogressive some women can be in an era of development like this.

By the way, I think you know Dorothy Brooks. Have you heard that her engagement to Mr. Metcalf is broken? I feel so sorry for her. Nevertheless, I can't really blame him as severely as some people seem to do for jilting her. I always was of the opinion that he was, as Francis would express it, roped into it. Minnie Lukens and that idiotic husband of hers, between them, fairly threw the girl at his head.

I remember being at the Southburys' dance a couple of evenings after that "romantic" meeting of theirs. The way they all acted about it on that occasion was inexpressibly foolish. It seemed that Mr. Metcalf had previously declared he was not going to the dance, and afterwards, as any man might, had changed his mind at the last minute. Minnie insisted that it was because he had learned suddenly that Dorothy was to be there, and Dot, as they call her, looked so absurdly conscious that the poor fellow, out of mere politeness, was obliged to show her considerable attention.

Of course, she's a very nice girl in many ways. Some people consider her pretty, but to me her face lacks character. I should judge her to be the sort of girl that attracts men at first but cannot hold them for any length of time. I feel very sorry about it all. They say that she, poor thing! feels dreadfully.

Though I've not written to you for so long, Georgina, you have not been out of mind with me. My little Christmas souvenir, I am afraid, may not have reached you on the day for which it was intended. We were in all the chaos resulting from a set of new maids at the time, and I was a little late in sending it. I hope a pastry-knife cannot cut friendship. If it can, you must send me a penny. Again wishing you a great deal of happiness during the New Year, I remain, faithfully your friend,

ISADORA HUNTER.

FROM MRS. RODNEY SKIPWITH JONES TO MISS EDNA BURNS.

NEW YORK, January 8.

DEAR OLD ED.: The darling lace handky you sent me reached me on Christmas Day and I'm reciprocating, though I fear somewhat tardily, with a silver pastry-knife. Don't be frightened. A pastry-knife can't cut friendship; or, if it can, you must send me a penny. You see, in view of your being a housekeeper-elect, I chose something practical. By the way, when is the great event to come off? Take my advice, child, and lay in all the diamonds and jewelry you can beforehand.

You'll never get a chance at such things afterwards. In your present roseate state of mind this may seem pessimistic, but take the warning of One Who Knows.

You ask why I've not written? Well, I will the tale unfold. I've been in the height of the fashion for once—had the grippe. I'm still feeling as disjointed and boneless as a goop.

My grippe will explain to you why the little gift comes so late. I commissioned Rodney to buy and send the things to people who mightn't understand, but I felt I could keep my intimates waiting till I was on my legs again. I wish now I'd kept everybody waiting. Since the letters of thanks (?) have been coming in and I've been finding out what his selections were my hair is gradually growing gray. One would think any man would know better than to send a woman with Aunt Hannah's prohibition sentiments a liqueur set. It's good-by to that little legacy, I suppose.

You'll be able to judge how shaky I still feel when you hear that I've not even been able to get over to see poor Dot Brooks. Did you know that her engagement to Howard Metcalf is broken? They say she's simply broken-hearted over it. I know he's a connection of yours by marriage, but as you've never met, I sha'n't hesitate to speak my mind. Dot only wrote me the merest line about it. From what I've heard elsewhere, though, I understand that he simply jilted her, and that his Lordship didn't give himself any great trouble in the matter of explanations either.

Of course, Dot wasn't Howard's first by any manner of means. He's been gone on half a dozen girls at different periods of his career, but since it had gotten as far as an engagement this time, we thought he was in earnest at last.

Deary me! Never shall I forget his face that evening at Foxs' last October, when young Cranston, the author, announced that he'd drawn his new historical-novel heroine from Dot. Howard was insanely jealous in a twinkling. He began at once upon a scathing arraignment of historical-romance literature in general and particular. If Emma Fox and I hadn't thrown ourselves into the breach and behaved like a vaudeville sketch team to carry it off, the entire evening would have been spoiled. As it was I half expected to find poor Cranston's corpse in the vestibule afterwards.

Of course, neither Cranston nor anybody else knew they were engaged at the time. Dot had the good sense to prevent probable murders by announcing it soon afterwards.

Apropos of nothing! You know Isadora Hunter, don't you? I remember your telling me that you met her somewhere and that she made you think of an educated cat. Just between ourselves, my dearie, —although Isadora and I are old friends,—I considered that sentence a trifle descriptive.

Well, Mrs. Hunter has gone South for the winter to recuperate. (Rodney says anyone who has put up with Isadora for twenty-six years has earned a rest.) Isa. is housekeeper pro tem. She seems to have gone in for domestic economy with just the same bang she took up Browning, golf, et cætera. From what I gather, with just as little common-sense too. My dear, I heard that they had twenty-four different maids in that house in one week. Don't you envy her unhappy father and brother? Well, there's one consolation for them, poor things! it won't last long.

Now, do write soon, Ed., telling me all about yourself and Jim. Devotedly yours,

GEORGIE.

P. S.—Rodney sends love and a kiss.

FROM MISS EDNA BURNS TO MRS. WALTER TRAVERS JOHNSON.

BALTIMORE, January 12.

DEAR AUNTY: I am writing this in time to *reach* you and *congratulate* you on your *silver wedding* anniversary. Many, many happy returns to you and *Uncle Walter*. Give uncle my *best love* and twenty-five *hugs*.

Thank you ever and *ever* so much for the set of *table-linen*. As you *advise*, I'll begin to hem them *right away*. It's true, as you say, that later on, when Jim and I decide upon the *exact date*, there will be so many things to attend to that I won't have time for them.

And this *reminds* me to tell you about *Howard Metcalf*. From what *you* and *other people* have told me about him I always thought I'd like to know him. Now, I think he must be a *perfect pig*, and I'm *so glad* I never met him. You must have heard, aunty, that his engagement to that *Miss Brooks* is *broken*. Perhaps he didn't tell you, though, that he *simply jilted* her. Why, a friend of hers told me that when the poor girl *begged* him for an *explanation* he just walked off without giving her one, and she's *perfectly* sick about it. Of course, I've never met her *myself*, but *they say* she's a *perfectly lovely* girl, and I don't see how any *man* could treat her so. Jim says what he needs is *kicking*, and I think so too. I know how *dreadfully* I'd feel if *Jim* treated *me* that way. I never dreamed any member of *uncle's family* could be that sort of a fellow. Perhaps I shouldn't have told you, but I'm just *full of it*, and, anyhow, if he's that kind of a *creature*, you might as well know.

Mother is writing by *this mail*. *The rest* are all well. Good-by for the *present*. With *lots of love* from your *affectionate niece*,

EDNA.

P. S.—I am sending you and uncle a little remembrance for your anniversary. It's a silver pastry-cutter, and I hope you'll like it. A

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pastry-knife can't cut friendship, can it? If it can, you must send me a penny.

FROM MRS. WALTER TRAVERS JOHNSON TO MISS DOROTHY BROOKS.

PHILADELPHIA, February 1.

MY DEAR DOROTHY: Your note announcing your impending marriage afforded me much pleasure. I am gratified that I was in any way instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation between you and Howard. You ask how I could possibly have told that you were secretly regretting the misunderstanding which resulted in the breaking of your engagement. The explanation is simple. Just previous to writing to Howard I heard what now appears—from his letter and yours—to be an entirely unfounded story to the effect that he had broken the engagement against your wishes. I was also given to understand that you were grieving over the estrangement. As Howard has no mother, and as I know him to be a warm-hearted though thoughtless boy, I informed him at once of what I had heard. I impressed it upon him that his conduct had caused you great unhappiness; that your friends feared even illness might result, and that it was clearly his duty to go to you at once; to do everything in his power to renew the engagement. So, you see, I must disclaim all power of mental telepathy.

I will ask you, Dorothy, to communicate this to Howard, as I am at present too much occupied to write to him, and he was anxious to know "what I thought he had been guilty of."

I am indeed glad that the report was a mistaken one. However, the experience will be a lesson in forbearance to you both—a most necessary one for young people beginning wedded life.

In one way at least you are starting out right. It gave me great pleasure to hear that you were to be married quietly. To my mind there is entirely too much orchestra and orange-blossom to modern weddings. The money expended upon these frivolities would much better be put away in bank against a rainy day.

It is very kind of you to urge me to be present on the fifteenth, but I fear that the east winds of February will prevent my doing so. I am sending, with my best wishes for you and Howard, a little wedding-gift in the form of a silver pastry-cutter. I trust it will be serviceable. If you are afraid that a pastry-knife will cut friendship, you must send me a penny. Your loving (future) aunt,

REBECCA JOHNSON.

